

ODD ISSUES

BY

S. SQUIRE SPRIGGE

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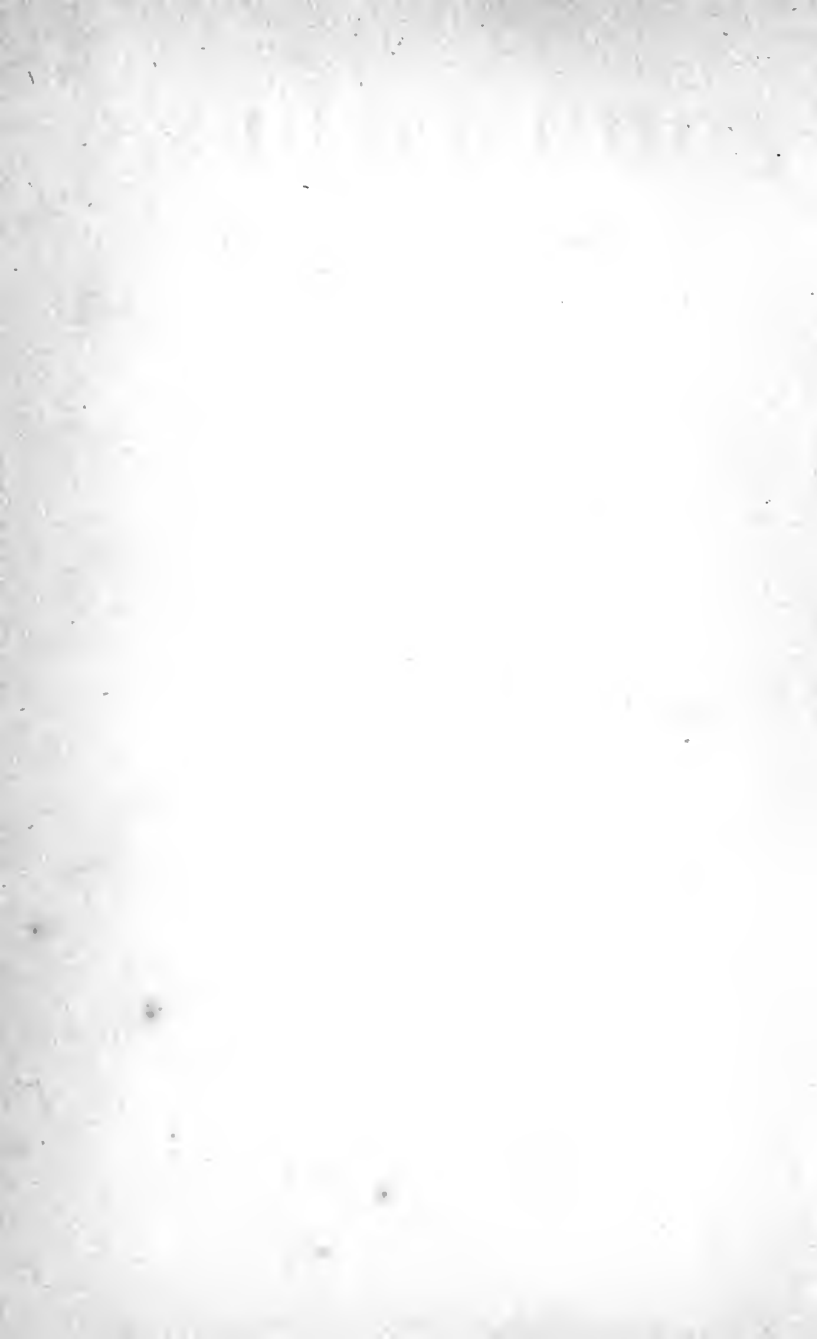
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S. SQUIRE SPRIGGE

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PREFACE

THE ominous number of thirteen short pieces are brought together here under one title. For the most part they tell a tale of wrongs and reprisals where after-events did not order themselves in accordance with anticipation. Four have not been printed before; the rest have been published. I feel that it is importunate to ask the public a second time to read what has been placed before them already; but I hope that the fact that all the stories have something in common may be allowed to serve me as an excuse for the re-issue of some.

S. S. S.

UNITED UNIVERSITY CLUB,
S.W.



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MR BONNAMY'S BISHOPRIC

MR BONNAMY, the college tutor, was a good man; and Mr Lawrence, the undergraduate, who lived immediately beneath him in the ancient quadrangle of St Jude's, was not half a bad fellow. But neither appreciated the other. The young man was an abiding source of irritation to his senior, so contemptuous was his attitude towards tutorial authority. He was not vicious, and he was not idle; but he could not be brought to recognise the necessity for definite rules, or the sinfulness of little sins. Now Mr Bonnamy was orderly to a pitch that would have appeared pedantic in a less single-hearted man, for he treated the missing of a chapel, the keeping of late hours, or the visit to town without a formal *exeat*, as heinous crimes instead of venial peccadillos. He was, however, no pedant, but rather a zealot, being bound up wholly in the welfare of the college, so that reverence for the standing orders under which that college was conducted came second with him to reverence for his Maker. This high sense of discipline received constant shocks from Mr Lawrence, who regarded all discipline as senseless. The two could never agree, and the inequality of their positions in the limited world of a university prevented either from entertaining any project of agreeing to differ. Consequently they annoyed each other without ceasing.

In truth—but Mr Bonnamy did not know it—the gulf fixed between himself and his young neighbour was not so very broad or deep. As senior tutor of St Jude's, Mr

Bonnamy represented in his own person the disciplinary side of the college as well as the perfected university career; but Mr Lawrence, the undergraduate, as a boat captain, a decent amateur actor, and a clever, masterful youth, represented the social side of current university life. The pious founder of St Jude's had the production and maintenance of Mr Bonnamy in his eye when he made the endowments; but to many people, especially to people outside the university, Lawrence appeared to be the more important person, as representing the 'varsity in contradistinction to the university. If it had been possible for the tutor to forget how vain and trivial a thing is an undergraduate, and for the undergraduate to recognise the fitness in the scheme of a university of persons to make rules and secure their observance, a compromise might have been effected. But neither could see anything from the other's standpoint. To Mr Bonnamy it seemed monstrous that he, the personification of the great work of St Jude's, behind whose labours lay five centuries of enlightened endeavour, should be thwarted in matters of detail by an idle boy. To the idle boy, Mr Bonnamy's behaviour was irksome and unmeaning. He was conscious of not requiring incessant watchfulness to protect him from moral and material ruin, and he desired to be let alone that he might employ himself according to his own bent, which, he would explain, was not towards the comprehension of the integral calculus, the corrupt chorus, or the common pump. Modest lad! he had chosen his part. He was engaged in writing an English *Comédie Humaine*, and the convenience of the occupation was that whatever he did fell under the denomination of "work," for he persisted in regarding all his actions as having for their object the collection of material. Did he boat—athletics

must be studied closely, seeing their importance in the English educational curriculum; poker—the influence of gambling in the formation of temperament must not be overlooked; promiscuous reading of fiction—Lawrence would own that he did not know everything, and that, like other authors, he was prepared to take whatever seemed good to him wherever he found it. Something of this rodomontade reached Mr Bonnamy's ears, who regarded what he heard as an attempt to set up excuses for idleness—which, in a way, was the case—but who failed to see that the disciple of Balzac was deceiving himself and not intending to deceive others. Taking this severe view, Mr Bonnamy marked out the undergraduate for rigorous treatment, and harried him handsomely whenever he exposed himself to attack. Lawrence was quick to perceive the animus against himself and resented it as best he could; and although his attempts at reprisal were not very effective against Mr Bonnamy's well-nigh impregnable position, and recoiled, for the most part, on his own head, he came near on one occasion to a very signal revenge. As will now appear.

In the course of writing the English *Comédie Humaine*, an intimate knowledge of certain phases of life became necessary to the young author, or, at any rate, an appearance of this knowledge. It should be premised that he had no particular desire to become practically acquainted with the scenes and characters that he proposed to describe, while his opportunities were limited—whatever his desire might be—by the restrictions imposed upon those still abiding *in statu pupillari*. But it was his aim to be thorough and encyclopædic, and he was determined not to shirk his just responsibilities. The page of reality being shut to his gaze, he turned to the page of fiction. Over

against St Jude's College stands the university library, one of the historic libraries of the world, whose shelves are constantly reinforced by the tolls exacted of publishers, and by the open-handed purchases of bibliophilist curators. This is no judicious selection of eminent or excellent works, but an orderly store-house for the literature of the world; and it need hardly be said that it is not a lending library. Members of the senate of the university, in their character of part proprietors, may borrow books; but undergraduates are free to consult the shelves only between certain hours of the day, and in academic attire. Lawrence occasionally used the library in this way; but the regulations, like all regulations, were distasteful to him. He wanted to read at night rather than in the daytime, and he believed that he could follow an author more closely in a blazer than in a college gown. He might have asked some friendly don to take out books for him; but he felt instinctively that the books which he desired to consult were not those that he could procure through the intercession of another man. Yet the idea of going without the books was far from his mind. He wished to have them in his rooms to consult them at his leisure; and so he took them. The college gown, which the bye-laws of the university enjoined upon him during his visits to the library, formed an ideal garb for book-lifting, and whenever he required a volume he went to the library and fetched it out as a matter of course. By this nefarious manœuvre, he accumulated in a short time some twenty or thirty books belonging to the university, and the trouble, rather than the risk, attendant upon replacing them made him cast about for a method of getting rid of them. He found the method suddenly, while he was sitting in Mr Bonnamy's ante-

room awaiting an interview upon the subject of an unduly large account at the college kitchen. He observed that many of the books in this ante-room were never shifted from their places upon the shelves, and he bethought himself of secreting the result of his burglaries behind the restful tomes. Some day or another Mr Bonnamy would discover them, and immediately Lawrence experienced a pang of regret as he thought that he should not be present to see his ascetic tutor's face on sudden confrontation with maxims of Gyp's duchesses, or the full-blooded sketches of M. Robida. The scene appealed strongly to his sense of the comic, and a severe reprimand for greediness decided him to put the idea into action at once. He felt that it was foolish of Mr Bonnamy to attribute to personal gluttony the size of a bill which was the sequence of a generous habit of playing the host, and he smarted under the injustice of the view. His rooms being immediately below Mr Bonnamy's, it was easy for him to watch that worthy gentleman's movements, and to select a minute when the ante-room was empty to step up and play the trick. So that evening the memoirs of M. de Casanova hid themselves coyly behind the Photii Græcum Lexicon, and from this time forward whenever Lawrence was summoned to Mr Bonnamy's presence in an official capacity he always carried with him two or three French novels, with a view of secreting them behind his tutor's books. Soon his unamiable joke underwent developments, for if he considered that he had been sent for unnecessarily, or that he had been treated with injustice, he would leave behind him some particularly leprous work, larcenously acquired of set purpose to meet such occasions. In this way Mr Bonnamy's book-shelves, so fine without, became whited sepulchres inwardly full

of rottenness and corruption. And there this ever-increasing lode of unedifying books lay until the morning, when Viscount Griston discovered it under circumstances that were fraught with the deepest consequence to Mr Bonnamy.

Mr Bonnamy, during his long connection with St Jude's—he had been tutor for no less than thirty years—had turned out a large number of very brilliant young men. His resolve to look upon every undergraduate as a unit of collegiate life, whose talents, whether small, respectable, or great, must be cultivated that he might swell the average aggregate of St Jude's men in the Honours list, had borne successful fruit. From a fashionable college St Jude's became under his dispensation a learned college, and one which possessed a great reputation for showing no unearned favours. By raising the standard of the tests for a place upon the foundation, and by throwing open to lads throughout the world scholarships that had previously been fenced about by conditions, Mr Bonnamy had succeeded in attracting to St Jude's the best raw material. By making it imperative upon all this material to assist him in the elaboration of itself from crudity into the hall-marked St Jude's article, he brought the finest influences of competition and *esprit de corps* to his aid. All must try that the best among them might be superlatively good, in which way the lamp of the revered university, through the replenishing offices of the beloved college, would shine forth again with mediæval splendour as the beacon of learning and culture.

Among these brilliant young men, and pre-eminent among them, was Viscount Griston, K.G., the Prime Minister of Great Britain. Lord Griston had been an

apt disciple of Mr Bonnamy ; but had imported into his master's respect for tradition both humour and robustiousness, which saved him from the appearance of being a prig, and furnished him with the tolerance of spirit necessary for public life. He was not a zealot, and was too human to be unjust to individuals out of deference to some ideal system. Yet he was Mr Bonnamy's very offspring in his deference to the aristocracy of intellect. Gifted with a ready mother-wit, a certain calmness and caninness of judgment, and a long purse, his lordship's political career had been a succession of successes. In the Upper House and on the democratic platform, in modern manufacturing centres and in old-world bucolic capitals, at city banquets, at meetings of scientific associations, at functions of all sorts from the consecration of a cathedral to the unveiling of a medallion, the audience were equally delighted to hear him, and anxious to see things as he saw them. His queer blend of scholarship and frivolity with prudence and audacity, which gave him such a hold on public opinion, had been developed at St Jude's, where he had been a learned scapegrace. No peasant-born prodigy striving for livelihood and social advancement ever worked with a more resolute intent to occupy a high place in the class-list than did this wealthy peer ; and no young rowdy got more unadulterated fun out of college life. But the fervour of his work had condoned his indiscretions in Mr Bonnamy's eyes.

One morning Lord Griston arrived at the university town on an important mission which he had delegated to himself. He designed to ask his late tutor to accept the bishopric of Dunwich. It had struck him that it would be picturesque to run down to St Jude's and

make the offer in person, and as he crossed the little grey stone quadrangle to Mr Bonnamy's rooms, he was meditating pleasantly on the surprise that the appointment would cause.

From time immemorial the big set of rooms on the first landing in the sunny southern corner of the court had belonged to the senior tutor of St Jude's, and Lord Griston sat down in the ante-room to take his turn for an audience with Mr Bonnamy. This waiting outside the door unannounced, in company with lively undergraduates summoned to explain their absence from lecture or chapel, appealed to his lordship's sense of humour as he recalled the errand which had brought him there. He had been wont in this chamber to anticipate Mr Bonnamy's reproofs. He was now sitting there waiting, as Prime Minister of Great Britain and a Knight of the Garter, to confer upon Mr Bonnamy a high honour. And Prime Minister though he was, and trustee of a nation's responsibilities, he was not impervious to the prickings of vanity stimulated by the consideration of the contrast. It was impossible for him to mark the difference between then and now without a certain satisfaction at the use he had made of his talents and opportunities.

Lord Griston was aware that the appointment which he decided to make would create general excitement. Mr Bonnamy was not in anyone's mind as a probable bishop. The Church would not know what to make of the choice, and the political world would be outraged at the preferment of a man who had done nothing that was widely appreciated, and had said nothing that was widely quoted. Lord Griston enjoyed this position. He knew, and everybody did not know it, that the

Crown would approve ; for Mr Bonnamy's unselfishness, goodness, and influence over men in high political and social positions were appreciated by the Fountain of Honour. Lord Griston's colleagues in the Government owed him an appointment or two, for he had been a generous chief in allowing them to direct much of his patronage. So that in the two directions where he was bound to study other judgments than his own he was free from apprehension. From the rest he was happy to receive censure.

There were several gowned young men waiting in Mr Bonnamy's ante-room when Lord Griston entered. They were standing in a group chatting, and all looked up at him. All save one looked away immediately, for nothing is more entirely uninteresting to the undergraduate than a middle-aged man of no apparent university standing. Such people may be good company in the vacations, and in their proper environment ; but within the walls of a college they become of no consequence. The eye of one lad remained fixed for a time upon his lordship, and a look of recognition seemed to be coming over his face. He was struggling to put a name to the familiar features. Lord Griston sought refuge in a book which he took from a loaded shelf behind him. It was not an interesting work, and his eye soon left the page and roved along the titles of the volumes near him, seeking a congenial exchange. But he could see nothing that was suitable to desultory reading. No poetry, no *belles lettres*, no story-books, not even books of history or theology broke the monotony of the serried rows within his reach. Only books of classical criticism, and large editions of Greek and Roman authors were there—those editions where on every page three or four lines of text

boldly printed at the top are explained away in minute type below by forty lines of exegesis, variant readings, and crabbed commentary. Lord Griston yawned and pondered. Cordial appreciation of such verbose hair-splitting, such inconsequent bickering over the unimportant, was one of the most tangible results of a classical education: did this say much for the classical education? He remembered dimly when such questions as were mooted and solved in these footnotes—only to be mooted again and solved differently elsewhere—had seemed of vital importance to him. Now it was marvellous to him that anyone should care anything at all about them. For purposes of examination they had their uses, but not the most ardent passion for truth could justify a man in spending years of adult study over them. He was about to replace the book when he saw, lining the gap whence he had taken it, another volume which had been apparently thrust to the back of the shelf. He put in an inquisitive hand, and withdrew a copy of "*Mademoiselle de Maupin*," stamped with the university arms. The discovery was a shock, for Mr Bonnamy was known to Lord Griston as an uncompromising puritan. Yet the book was a classic; and no less a critic than Mr Swinburne had labelled it "the golden book of spirit and sense," so that there was no reason why Mr Bonnamy should not read and enjoy it. Lord Griston wished that his old friend had not thought it necessary to conceal the narrative of this curious young lady behind works of classical criticism; but he knew that the undergraduate was a censorious person, and could understand that a man in the position of a tutor might feel it justifiable to take precautions that would have savoured of hypocrisy in more free agents. He

slipped the book back into its recess, and in doing so his fingers impinged upon a second concealed volume. This time the work was without the claims to grace and literary merit that are so strong in Gautier's youthful extravaganza, while the choice of incident was every whit as unrestrained. A third book lay behind this—a nightmare by a decadent; and one behind this whose title was a confession of shame.

The trend of Mr Bonnamy's hoard of secreted books was now quite unmistakable. A voracious novel-reader, and by nature curious as to the moods and manners of his fellow-man, Lord Griston knew something of each of his discoveries, and it seemed to him impossible that he should ask a student of such literature to fill the historic bishopstool of Dunwich. He rose, and slipped out of the room without attempting to see Mr Bonnamy, a proceeding which was quite easy, for at mid-day, when the tutor was holding his official *levée*, no one marked the goings-out and comings-in of the visitors. The lad who had stared at Lord Griston looked up at the retreating figure, and said—he was a student of Punch—"That's just like the pictures of Lord Griston"; but an older undergraduate, one who knew his way about town, and who had been to a debate in the House of Commons, at once contradicted him severely.

Lord Griston walked to the rooms of an intimate friend, and discovered as he walked that he was deeply chagrined at being unable, with a good conscience, to offer the bishopric of Dunwich to his old tutor. The fitness of the appointment had never been so clear to him as now when he felt that the thing could not be. There was something about the situation of a pupil rewarding a

master which was sure to catch the fancy of the public, and to become the subject of amiable comment in the journals, and none knew better than Lord Griston the value to a politician of such pleasant advertisement. Again, how annoyed the opposite party would have been at his courage in making such a selection. They dared not have done it; yet Mr Bonnamy had nothing in common with the political programme of Lord Griston, and as far as he belonged to any school of politics must have been reckoned as Lord Griston's foe. This position of affairs would not have escaped the attention of the champions of the Church, who accordingly would have found themselves driven to praise the official head of a Government that was strongly suspected of grim designs for disestablishment. Besides, old Bonnamy would have looked the part so admirably, the clean-shaven face, high cheek-bones, long thin hands, and wintry smile being so apt for episcopal attire. Nor were better motives wanting for Lord Griston's regrets than the loss of an æsthetic opportunity and an elegant *réclame*. He was genuinely fond of Mr Bonnamy. He knew himself to owe very much to his tutor; while the number of prominent public servants whom Mr Bonnamy had moulded stood as a proof of insight and foresight such as might well look for reward at the hands of the country. From every point of view, save one, that presented itself to Lord Griston, it was regrettable that such a man could not be asked to become bishop of Dunwich.

Lord Griston's great friend, who had been his fellow-student at Eton and also at St Jude's College, was now a university professor. Professor Goring had been the better scholar of the two, though once or twice, in competitive examinations, the flexibility of Lord Griston's wit had snatched a prize from superior learning. This gentle-

man had made scholarship a career, and now pursued knowledge, entirely for its own sake, and with no striving after worldly advancement. He was an authority on periods of history concerning which other men wrote books, but no amount of bumptiousness or ignorance displayed by brother historians had ever moved him to controversy. Now and again he would make a short contribution to current literature, and when he did so his remarks were final. For if there were in them details to correct there was no one who could make the corrections. He had preserved a close personal friendship with Lord Griston, whom he rarely saw, and to whom he never wrote. But when circumstances threw the two men together, the social gap between the Prime Minister and the professor was always bridged immediately, and the relations of boyhood were re-established. Lord Griston, on the first occasion when he had anything to give away, had hinted that he should like dearly to do something for Mr Goring, to which Mr Goring had replied that he wanted to clear up a few obscure points in Assyrian political economy, and there he did not think Lord Griston could help him. Lord Griston retorted that he had beaten Mr Goring in scholarship before now, and that he would use his first leisure in looking into the matter and providing the information required — and never repeated his offer of patronage.

Professor Goring was at home.

"Hullo, Alexander!" said he—he had christened Lord Griston "Alexander" because of his lordship's apparent design to conquer all worlds, the worlds of fashion, politics, sport, and scholarship alike—"Hullo, Alexander! What brings you here?"

"Well," replied Lord Griston, pushing a heap of maps

on to the floor, and sitting down in the easy-chair thus cleared, "I'm rather in a hole."

"And you have come to me for advice? It is natural; it is pleasantly reminiscent of old times; it is also piquant. I hope you are going to tell me a Cabinet secret, something scabrous about a reigning monarch."

"I ran up," said Lord Griston, "intending to ask old Bonnamy to be bishop of Dunwich. I thought it would amuse me to offer him the thing personally; and now I've weakened on it. I want to ask him and I don't want to ask him, and I should like to know what you think about it."

"Um—" said Professor Goring, slowly, "I suppose you know that I see a good deal of Bonnamy these days?"

"That makes your opinion especially valuable," said Lord Griston.

"Um—" said Professor Goring again, and dwelling for a long time on the interjection; "it makes the thing rather difficult for me. The man is a friend of mine, and I might be prejudiced in his favour, or I might suppress what I ought to say against him."

"All right," said Lord Griston; "I know all I want to know. It's clear you do not think the appointment a good one, and that settles the matter. I hoped you might have said something to persuade me the other way, and I'm sorry, because I should like old Bonnamy to be a bishop."

"I should like old Bonnamy to be a bishop, principally because old Bonnamy himself would like to be a bishop. But I cannot say honestly that I consider him to be the kind of stuff of which a useful modern bishop would be made. Fifty years ago, Bonnamy would have been the

ideal ruler of such a see as Dunwich; but nowadays, as in the Middle Ages, more is wanted of a bishop."

"Constitutional history?" said the Premier, smiling.

"Yes," said Professor Goring; "and very decent authority, too. When bishops were statesmen they were forced to know something of life. And now that the affairs of a diocese are as complicated as the affairs of a mediæval kingdom, bishops must again be men of the world."

"I think laymen make better prime ministers," said Lord Griston; "and, for one, I should resist clerical encroachment in that direction."

"I am serious," said Professor Goring. "Bonnamy is not your man."

"But doesn't the management of a college require some knowledge of life?" asked Lord Griston, who remembered that he himself had given Mr Bonnamy frequent cause for anxiety and for the exercise of diplomatic treatment.

"It's all work in a settled groove," replied the professor. "Besides, a college tutor is only concerned with men, and, for the most part, with men of one stereotyped class; while a bishop has to deal with both sexes and their countless crosses and blends. They've all got souls to be saved, and he mustn't try to save them in his own way, for he is under a contract with the Crown to work out their salvation according to certain rules. I can't imagine worse training for a bishop than the experiences of a college tutor. The one man has a free hand, in a small sphere; the other no liberty of action, and an immense field for his exertions."

"I hate a pragmatist priest," was the Prime Minister's irrelevant comment.

"Do you?" said Professor Goring. "Well, the day

of the cultured ascetic and the elegant scholar is gone by. A modern bishop has to marshal the forces of his diocese against social evils, and he ought to know the lie of the ground. Now, consider! What does old Bonnamy know of sin? No woman ought to be so innocent as old Bonnamy, or so unprotected."

"I suppose," said Lord Griston, looking at the ash of his cigarette, "that old Bonnamy is really as innocent as all that, eh? One hears of such excellence, but how seldom one meets it!"

"I vouch for Bonnamy, absolutely. He is ignorant of all that is meant by passion. He has passed his life untempted, and cannot understand either temptation or fall. The cloistered monk will always take care to learn something of what he has renounced, for how otherwise can he take credit for his acts of renunciation? But a man like Bonnamy lives all his life as closely immured by circumstances as any monk by walls, with the difference that he never knows his disabilities, and never makes any attempt to learn the vast provinces of life which lie without his ken."

"By Jove! Goring," said the Prime Minister, "I wish you'd let me make you a privy councillor. You are stuffed with precepts, and if they are not good they sound good. But doesn't it strike you that what you have just said could be made, by a little exaggeration, into an argument for the appointment to the episcopacy of men of pleasure?"

"Pooh!" said the professor, "a man of 'pleasure is always an ignoramus. He spends his time in making mistakes about his own particular subject. If Bonnamy knew things that are obvious to the rake—but not one whit less obvious to all who have lived among their

fellows, mark that!—he would be better equipped for a bishop's position. Of the passion that engrosses half the thoughts of humanity; that is the last goal of most human endeavour; that enters boldly into the business of states, and glides privily into the manuscripts of philosophers; that exalts the knave into the hero, and transmutes the saint into the satyr, he knows nothing."

"Not even by hearsay—er—or by reading?"

"Not even so, or there might be hope for him. He reads philology, and he never hears anyone say anything, for his conversation is entirely with the undergraduates, and he does the talking."

"But you talk to him?"

"I am not a corrupter of innocence. And now, we will have luncheon, and afterwards you can go over to Bonnamy, and make him bishop of Dunwich. I know you, Alexander, and I know very well that you will not take my advice, although, for some reason or other, you have wanted to hear what I should say. Why was that?"

"You will see what you will see," returned Lord Griston. "Cease your attempts to pump a minister of the Crown. But you may rest assured of one thing—I have listened to every word you have said with the deepest attention. May I wash my hands?"

So, after luncheon, Lord Griston returned to Mr Bonnamy's rooms, and finding him there, offered him the bishopric of Dunwich. He was making the appointment, he told himself, on sound gambling principles, as there were double chances in its favour. For, while he considered Mr Bonnamy to be the very man for a bishopric, with the one reservation that he knew too

much, Professor Goring—a shrewd man, surely—regarded Mr Bonnamy's total ignorance as an obstacle to his preferment.

It only remains to add that Mr Bonnamy carried to Dunwich the same relentless ardour for work, the same honesty of purpose, the same unselfishness, and the same lofty ideals that had characterised his labours at St Jude's; and that these qualities served him, and continue to serve him, well in the absence of an intimate knowledge of the world. He does not bulk largely in politics or in clerical affairs; but when, now and again, his words or his deeds give him public prominence, to Professor Goring the innocence of the man is always revealed, while no less invariably is Lord Griston able to detect his subtlety, and Mr Lawrence his fidgety arrogance.

TWO WOMEN AND A MILLIONAIRE

THE women's surgery at the hospital held out invitations to those who would be comfortable. It was warm, quiet, and brilliantly clean, forming on a bleak November night an agreeable contrast to the dirt and turbulence of the streets without. In the grate a low fire carefully banked burnt ruddily, with no obtrusive crackling or roaring, and the kettle upon the uppermost bar purred with just sufficient vigour to accentuate the cosiness of the room, without arousing any fear of approaching ebullition. The gas was turned down until an uncertain fringe of yellow flame played around the blue core, and its subdued flickering fell on gleaming copper trays and polished porcelain basins, and was thence deflected on to the bright brown teak of the floor, lighting the room with numberless little points and streaks of dancing brightness, yet otherwise respecting its comfortable dimness.

The surgery contained three people, who were seated close to the hearth, in silence. A high screen, from which depended the formal folds of much coarse linen, was so placed in broad angles round the fireside that an irregularly shaped nook was shut off from the general space, thus securing for the occupants of the hearth the additional comfort of privacy.

Two of them, seated upon one chair, were mother and son, a piece of information which the child volunteered now and again by a muttered "Mummy," as some little movement of the woman in whose lap he lay aroused him

from his slumbers. She was a comfortable-looking person, and had readily fallen under the comforting influences of the room. She might have been thirty or fifty, and was really thirty-five. Her broad fat face displayed nothing but that sort of spurious good nature that is born of immediately comfortable circumstances. She bore upon her evident signs of poverty and hard work. The fringe of untidy hair which surmounted her placid and shapeless face was tinged with grey before its time, and on this was perched a large bonnet adorned with fur, feathers, plush, and flowers in varying proportions, but all alike showing signs of approaching disintegration. The little boy's head, swathed in bandages, was tucked away in the folds of a faded, bead-decorated arrangement which hung around her shoulders. She had drawn her chair, the lower and more restful of the two seats, close to the fire, so that she was able to place her feet on the fender; and her manner and attitude, as she bent over the coals, suggested that there were but three things wanting to complete her perfect comfort—something hot to eat, something hot to drink, and a congenial companion with whom to exchange sentiments.

She looked at the occupant of the opposite chair, but saw in her nothing congenial.

This woman was much younger and much smarter, although her smartness had an air of being maintained in defiance of her clothes and her youth in defiance of her experiences. She sat stiffly before the fire, as though unwilling to allow, even to herself, that the rest and warmth were grateful to her. She gave the impression, indeed, of being in a general condition of revolt against her surroundings, her life, and her fellow-man, including especially her fellow-woman. She was young and slight,

with a regular profile, transparent nostrils, thin curled lips, and high cheek-bones. Her pursed-up mouth and reckless, abstracted air conveyed no invitation to any one to enter into comfortable chat with her, and even the elder woman's smug obtuseness did not prevent her from arriving at this conclusion.

Accident, however, broke a silence that might have been indefinitely prolonged, and accident dictated that the younger woman should address the elder.

"Your dress is scorching," she said.

For the matron, while musing over the problem of speech or silence, impelled by conviviality to address her neighbour and by the pride of matronhood to ignore that kind of young woman, had succumbed to the forgetfulness of a muddy reverie. In this state she allowed the stained folds of her dress to fall so near to the fire that the room became filled with the acrid smell of garments in an early stage of burning. The fact did not impress itself upon her broad nostrils quickly. At first the younger woman, having assured herself that it was no property of her own whose dangerous plight was thus making itself apparent, seemed disposed to say nothing, but rather to watch composedly the other's smoking skirts. Kinder counsel, however, suddenly prevailed, and she gave an abrupt warning.

"Thank you, now," said the elder woman ; "and so it is. I'm much obliged to you. I'm that fond of a fire myself that I like to get almost on the top of it. But one can have too much of it, like other good things, as they say. Now, what are you 'ere for, if I may take the liberty of harskin'?"

The girl looked at her questioner's face for a moment. Evidently, however, the woman was kind-hearted as well as curious, and so an answer was given.

"Broken ribs," she said.

"That'll be bad for you," went on the stout lady with unction. "You'll feel that all along your back."

"Yes; I do if I cough, and I can't help coughing in these foggy nights. But it's all right keeping still, and nurse does me up so tight I don't want to move. And I should have to sit a long time if I waited till the fog lifted."

"Well, it's quiet an' comfortable in 'ere, ain't it now?" said the stout lady.

"And pretty dull and slow," said the other, aggressively. "At least I should find it so. I'm for something more lively." And it is impossible to convey the cold, sad hopelessness with which this bacchanalian sentiment was uttered.

"I 'ear as how the nurses don't 'ave a slow time at all," said the stout lady, whose blood was beginning to be stirred by the warmth, and whose conversation at once began to flow in its favourite channels. "That one seems to be carrying on with the young doctor pretty gay," she said, looking round the screen significantly at the house-surgeon, who was gossiping languidly with a nurse in the doorway. "I'm told as 'ow——"

"You ought to be ashamed to say such things about her, or any of them!" said the girl, with the ghost of a blush rising on her cheek. Now it is probable that it would have been difficult to say anything in her presence that could be counted upon with certainty to heighten her colour.

The matron relapsed into indignant silence under the reproach, and twiddled the little circlet on her knotted ring-finger. Here she sat, a respectable married woman—a *rôle* she was wont to play with marked emphasis in her

least respectable moments—rebuked by a bit of a girl, whose appearance told all to a London eye.

It was too much, and she woke up the child, shook him, and said angrily: "Lie still, can't yer?"

"I should like an operation or something exciting to-night," the house-surgeon was saying, with a listlessness that assorted badly with the ferocity of his desires. "I have not had a good case all my week. I get no luck somehow. Why are those women in here at this time of night? They're looking at us, and speaking of you. Are they ill? Have they seen anybody?"

"Me," said the nurse, calmly; "could you suggest anybody nicer?"

"You are certainly a very fascinating young woman," he replied; "but I can imagine sick people yearning to hear some more authoritative voice. If nothing occurs to relieve the monotony of the evening, I shall take the bandages off that child's head for the pleasure of putting them on again."

"I suppose you mean," said she, "what's the matter with them? Well, the girl's got a broken rib. I bandage it for her sometimes in the evening. She told *you*—only you've forgotten her—that she did it falling down stairs; but she told *me* it was her husband."

"And that," said the house-surgeon, "was probably a euphemism."

"The child's got a cut on the head," the nurse continued, disregarding the interruption. "The woman's his mother. There's nothing the matter with her to-night; but, as a general rule, she is a little drunk. She is waiting for a 'bus. They are here because I told them they might sit over the fire if they liked. Is that a

satisfactory explanation?" and she dropped him a fraction of a curtsy.

He walked slowly towards the fire.

"We're just a-going," said the stout lady, ingratiatingly. "Nurse said I might stop here till I was rested, for the boy's no light weight to carry about in yer arms 'arf over London."

"If you don't live this side of London you've no business in this hospital," said the house-surgeon. "His head's going on all right, I suppose?" laying a finger on the bandage.

But while the good woman was preparing an answer that should combine dignity with gratitude, he turned to the girl.

"You look bad," he said; "are you in pain?"

"No, sir; not as long as I keep still."

"How far have you got to go?"

"About a mile."

"Why didn't you come up in the morning, at the right time? This night air makes you cough."

"Yes, sir," said the girl, vaguely, holding forward her wrist in silent answer to his outstretched finger and thumb.

"That girl's hungry," he said, returning to the nurse at the door; "and the woman's the sort that can always eat. That's why she's not dead of drink. When the other one takes to drink she won't last. Let 'em stay and be happy. See if you can have some beef-tea made, and let 'em drink it in there. It's strictly against rules and most sensible treatment."

"Was it yer 'usbin'?" said the stout lady, rocking a little backwards and forwards in her chair, and deciding

to pocket the recent affront. Then, leaning back luxuriously, she extended from beneath her mud-bordered gown a shapeless and dilapidated boot—the inevitable spring-side boot of the police report—surmounted by pendant folds of whitey-brown stocking, and gave a little prod with her toe towards the fire. “Was it yer ’usbin’?” she repeated, still with the kicking movement of her foot. “It’s ’ow our ribs gets broke mostly.”

“Well, what if it was?” said the girl, hesitatingly. “Anyhow, I haven’t got a husband now, thank God! What’s the good of a husband? I can get along without. That child’s yours? I suppose his father’s been hitting him. It’s how all the children’s heads get cut. Thank God! I’ve got no children.”

“You seem to be one of the thankful sort,” said the stout lady, “and with all yer so thankful yer don’t seem very gay—that is, I mean——”

“All right. Go on,” said the girl.

“There’s worse things than a ’ome and a ’usbin’ and yer kids about the place, I can tell yer. That’s what I mean to say.”

“I’ve got a home. Mine’s a very comfortable little place,” said the girl; “and the furniture’s all my own. But what’s the good of a husband? What’s yours done for you?”

The owner of the marriage ring paused a little before answering. It was necessary to vindicate her position, and testify to the blessings of conjugality. Yet she was dying to tell the tale of her wrongs; but she was possessed vaguely with the idea that she could not very well do both things together.

“I’m a respectable married woman,” she said at last, “though I don’t mind tellin’ yer that my ’usbin’ was a

bad lot. Still, there's worse about, and I mightier got 'old of one o' them. He turned out a bad lot from the first to me, though he mightier 'ad 'is good points towards hothers, if you understand me what I mean. He used me cruel, 'e did. You see, he was on at the 'alls, and that made 'im very popular. Swells used to say 'ow-d' ye-do to him, and so did the swells' gals. And 'e used to 'ave to dress 'isself very fine, so's to keep up the position 'e'd got to, and that often made 'im very short of money. Then I 'ad to arst 'im for it, for the 'ouse, for 'e was a particular man, and liked 'is bit of steak and 'is cup of cawfee at all hours if 'e fancied it. And 'e liked to see the boy nicely dressed, and that all cost money. And if I arst 'im for it when 'e 'adn't got it, he used to carry on terrible and 'it me; and if I arst 'im for it when 'e 'ad it in 'is pawket, 'e'd larf, and arsk if I took 'im for a bloomin' milliyonaire. That was one of 'is songs, yer know, 'The Bloomin' Milliyonaire' was."

All this was given with much repetition, and with frequent pauses for breath and for encouragement, prefaced by the questions, "Yer know?" or "Yer understand me what I mean?" The girl's invariable response had been a nod, but here she spoke.

"Oh! was it?" said she, thoughtfully. "And where is he now?"

"He's still singin', and makin' ten quid a week easy. He left me one day, and never said a word about goin'. He were a bad lot. But some girl got 'old of 'im. They're worse than the men, though the men are bad enough. She were a bad 'un, I'll lay. He sent a lawyer feller—a young bit of a feller—round to me to arsk me to let 'im alone so long as 'e give me ten bob a week for myself and the kid, and I told the young feller—

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I says, 'Oh, d——'is ten bob a week,' I says, 'an' 'im too; he needn't be afraid I shall come after 'im! I can make more money than that a-washing and charing. I've often 'ad to do it afore 'e left me, when 'is screw was as much as ten or fifteen quid a week.' You don't believe it, but it's true what I say, and I'll tell yer 'is name. You'll know it fast enough. His name is——"

"Here! take hold," said the nurse, offering the beef-tea; "they're hot. One for you, and one for the boy. You keep your breath to cool them. There never was such a woman to gossip."

Silence again fell upon the little room, broken only by the clatter of the pewter spoons against the basins. At last this too ceased, and the women looked more confidentially at each other.

"You look a lot better," said the stout lady, sympathetically.

"It was not my husband who did it," said the girl, putting her hand to her side, and referring to the stout lady's question. "And it wasn't with his foot," she continued communicatively, for there is no better stimulant than strong broth, and it had produced a rapid effect upon this hungry and delicate girl. "It might have been with his foot, and I dare say it would have been, if he couldn't have got me with his hand; but, as I say, that's as it might have been. But he pushed me with his hand, and I came up against the banister. He was very sorry afterwards that he hurt me."

"Does he behave well to yer in general?"

"He used to—pretty well—as well as most of us get treated. You see, like your man was, he's on at the halls, and he has to live well, and spend his money on

himself. When he has any over he's all right. But I haven't set eyes on him for some days. He took my gold watch, that I had given to me when I was in better circumstances, and I sha'n't see him again for a week, I dare say."

"Oh, that's 'is sort, is it? Well, it's a good riddance, I should think," said the stout lady. "But they're all alike, and 'e'll come back to yer when 'e's broke or ill."

"I hope so," said the girl.

"I wonder whether I could tell yer his name! I used to know most of the 'all singers when my 'usbin' was with me. He used to like me to go and sit in the front row with the boy, in 'is black velvet soot and a white hem-broidery collar on 'im, and 'is little bit of 'air curled up in a knob. And I used to put on a sealskin jacket, and sit there, too. And sometimes I'd have a pint of champagne, and then 'e used to say: 'You keep the bottle in front of you when you've drunk the wine. It looks well to see you in your furs a-drinking fizz in the stalls like a duchess.' For 'e was a proud man, don't yer know? But what would yer man's name be, now? I'm sure I can guess."

"Don't you bother about him," said the girl. "Maybe you'll know soon enough."

"Oh, very well, miss," said the stout lady, emphatically. "I'm not hanxious to hintrude upon any lydy's confidence. I'm not of the curious sort." The good woman spoke bitterly, for she felt that she had condescended towards this young woman, and that in return she had been snubbed on two occasions.

The girl looked at her steadily, and began to breathe a little hard.

"Very well," she said, "I'll tell you. His name is——"

But before she could finish her sentence the quiet of the place was suddenly broken in upon. All the passage outside became vaguely full of sound and bustle. A porter entered hurriedly, and turned his lantern this way and that, flashing its light through the half gloom. Noticing the women behind the screen, he said: "I expect you'll have to clear out of this, the men's surgery is full"; and began setting the taps running.

Now, through the various sounds of scurry, through the shuffle of the badly-slippered and the clang of the heavily-booted, there fell on the ear, monotonously, and with regular intervals, the measured tramp of persons carrying a joint burden, and labouring under it.

"Policemen," said the girl, with a little shiver.

And then the gently impertinent accents of the house-surgeon could be heard above this din.

"Take him to the women's surgery; it's empty. If it isn't, send the women into the passage."

The nurse came hurriedly back into the room, and turned up all the depressed gas-jets. The little child woke on the fat woman's knee, and, becoming frightened at the noise and bustle, began to sob.

And the feet came to the door.

"You must go out, please," said the nurse to the scared women before the fire. "Make haste!"

They rose obediently, and made for the door. But they were too late. Before they could reach it, egress was prevented by the advancing crowd, and they crept back to their nook.

In front came the house-surgeon, with a fidgetiness about his hands and a sparkle in his eye that belied his lounging gait and affectation of hardly knowing what he was there for.

"Set him down here," he said to the toiling constables, whose tread and breathing betrayed that their burden had been a heavy one.

And the crowd closed round, and from them arose an indistinct buzz of question and suggestion. For it was not yet late at night, and the various house-surgeons and house-physicians, with their dressers, their clerks, and their friends, were all alert to respond to the exciting summons of the accident-bell. It was a mixed crowd that surrounded the stretcher. Here the flaring and wind-swayed gas-lights fell upon an orthodox evening costume, and here upon a frayed smoking-jacket. On one side they lit up the violet dress, bright brown hair, and gleaming apron of some nurse, devoted, perhaps, to the practice of good works, but by no means blind to the value of good looks; on the other they lit up the sombre uniform of the policemen. And from all there arose a hum of queries, and as each pressed nearer, or got a view on tiptoe over the shoulder of some one better placed, he would give utterance to a murmur of astonishment. Even the sound of stifled laughter was not absent.

The two women, who had sat down again on finding the passage to the door barred to them, looked at each other in awe-struck curiosity, and the boy smiled at their solemn faces, in sympathy with the laughter that he could hear.

"He's dead," said the house-surgeon, carelessly. "He was dead when he was brought in. Stand aside, you fellows, and let's see the gas on his face. Pull away that screen. It was an aneurism, I should think."

The crowd that stood between the stretcher and the fire divided, so that the gas over the mantelpiece might fall unshadowed upon the dead man. And down the defile the two women looked.

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Upon the stretcher there lay, looking up to the ceiling, an enormous, fat fellow, with swollen, pendulous cheeks, and a big stomach. He was in full evening dress of the extremest sort, and upon the outrageously glossy collar of his coat reposed a hideous circular floral ornament, and two yellow medals attached to parti-coloured ribbons.

"It's 'Big Bill Ridley,'" whispered a scared student, to whom music-hall-land was familiar. A policeman confirmed him. It was that great artist. The wretched man had fallen forwards dead while leading the refrain in the world-famous song:

I am a gentleman of the town
And take my brandy-and-soda brown,
Like a blooming milliyon-haire.

He had a bottle of soda-water with him, and a broken umbrella. These were supposed to accentuate to dull minds the indisputable truth of the fact that he was a gentleman of the town. He had dropped with his dramatic accessories in his hands, and they had never been removed from his grasp.

His face was turned away from the light. The young house-surgeon, who was moved almost to the point of sickness, turned the flaccid neck round, bringing the face towards the fire, and remarked callously, as a protest against his own emotion, "Well, you're not exactly a beauty!" The ground colour of the skin, where the various additions allowed this to be seen at all, was the livid hue of death from hæmorrhage. Upon this stood forth in startling contrast the crimson tinting of the cheeks, lips, and nose, added to bear out the accuracy of the death-song. An impossibly blonde moustache, dis-

placed and ungummed, but not yet removed from his face, added terror by its incongruous comicality. The whole of this horrible face was framed in the tousled mass of tow forming the preposterous wig necessitated by public taste for the enacting of the part of a gentleman of the town.

"Dada!" screamed the child, as the face was turned towards him. "Dada!"

"O Bill!" said the girl, chokingly, as she threw herself upon him, "O Bill!"

"I'm a respectable married woman, and 'is lawful wedded wife," said the stout lady; "and 'is clothes, and the money in 'is pocket I claim for this orphing lamb—and 'is gold watch."

"Take these women out," said the house-surgeon.

THE CANDIDATES

THE MARCHIONESS OF LAUNCESTON, *A Great Lady.*

THE LADY HONORIA TREPOLPEN, *Her Daughter.*

MRS BYWATER, *A Friend.*

*Scene: The Drawing-room in Trepolpen House, Park Lane.
Lady Launceston and Mrs Bywater conversing; Lady
Honorina is sitting in the background.*

MRS BYWATER: And you have actually selected Mr Wilkinson?

LADY LAUNCESTON: I have.

MRS BYWATER: And now he will become Sir George's secretary?

LADY LAUNCESTON: Well, Sir George has a veto, I suppose, as he has to pay the salary. But it won't be very polite of him to exercise it. It was his own suggestion that I should find a secretary for him, because my house was always full of nice young men. Sir George was kind enough to say that.

MRS BYWATER: It's a very lucky thing for Mr Wilkinson.

LADY LAUNCESTON: Very! He's a made man, if he behaves; Sir George must have a seat in our next reputable Cabinet—if we ever get such a thing again. What Mr Wilkinson has to do now is to marry well. Really well! And then he ought to go very far. With his prospects he is quite a good match for any girl in England. Any girl—I mean it.

MRS BYWATER (*softly, and lifting her eyebrows as she inclines her head towards Lady Honoria*): Any girl?

LADY LAUNCESTON (*softly*): Of course not! Preposterous! Say—almost any, if you like.

MRS BYWATER: Well, I thought one day, when I saw them together——

LADY LAUNCESTON: Preposterous! Quite preposterous! (*Raising her voice*) Honoria!

LADY HONORIA: Yes, mamma.

LADY LAUNCESTON: Remind me to ask your friend Miss Griffiths to meet Mr Wilkinson. (*To Mrs Bywater*) Immensely rich, my dear—and the Merthyr-Tydvil abeyance might be terminated in her favour at any moment.

MRS BYWATER: And she's to give all that to Sir George's secretary? Why, you're quite ridiculous about him, dear Lady Launceston. Having made his political future, are you now going to take his matrimonial future in hand?

LADY LAUNCESTON: Well, why not? The two things should go together. He is an exceedingly well-bred and agreeable young man—punctual, clever, and sensible in his views (which is not the same thing); and although he has all these virtues, he finds time to be pleasant and well-dressed. I thought yesterday his clothes were admirable.

MRS BYWATER: Considering his origin——

LADY LAUNCESTON (*interrupting*): Rubbish! Sheer rubbish, Emma! You needn't take anything into consideration. That sort of way of looking at things is horribly obsolete. Mr Wilkinson is himself a gentleman all over, and that is enough. Do you suppose I don't know the article when I see it? Remember that Launceston was once an ambassador. By the way, everyone has forgotten our embassies, and we spent such a lot of money

on them! Let me tell you, there's nothing like an embassy for bringing you into contact with young men, so I know what I'm talking about. And I say that John Wilkinson is a perfect gentleman, both in thought and manner, though his mother was my maid.

LADY HONORIA: Governess, mamma.

LADY LAUNCESTON: Well, nursery-governess. She did my hair, and forgot to sew the buttons on my boots. I was very sorry when she left to get married. Not that she did my hair at all well, but I liked her very much indeed.

MRS BYWATER: Perhaps the young man takes after his father, and gets his manners that way.

LADY LAUNCESTON: Perhaps. The father was a clerk.

LADY HONORIA: A private secretary, mamma.

LADY LAUNCESTON: Well, a confidential clerk. And when he died the mother asked me to help her son. And Lord Launceston wanted me to put him in a shop, so I sent him to Cambridge——

LADY HONORIA: Where he was a wrangler.

LADY LAUNCESTON: Was it a wrangler? Well, everybody said it was very nice of him, whatever it was. And he has been here occasionally—a good deal, in fact. And he has perfect manners. Perfect. As distinguished from scrupulous manners, and over-fussiness about opening a door——

LADY HONORIA: Poor Lord Pomeroy. I know mamma means Lord Pomeroy.

LADY LAUNCESTON: Or polished manners, and over-pronunciation of the consonants——

LADY HONORIA: That's cousin Harry. There's no mistaking him.

LADY LAUNCESTON: Or careless, easy manners, and slang in the drawing-room——

MRS BYWATER: Oh! That's my boy. Poor Tommie! But you encourage him, dear Lady Launceston.

LADY LAUNCESTON: Do I? What of it? I must be in the movement. It's *chic* for an aged marchioness to know all about the music-halls; but it would be very bad form in Honoria, and *you* simply can't afford to be vulgar, my dear, in your position.

MRS BYWATER: And have you selected Mr Wilkinson to be private and confidential secretary to such a man as Sir George Garnett simply because he behaves properly in a room?

LADY LAUNCESTON: Not at all!

LADY HONORIA: Mamma, you might let me hear what you said. (*To Mrs Bywater*) I suggested four candidates to her, and what she should ask them, and I ought to hear how they came out under examination. Don't you think so, Mrs Bywater?

LADY LAUNCESTON (*smiling*): Look in my *escritoire*. Yes; that's it. Give it to me. (*Takes paper from Lady Honoria.*) This is the rough draft of my letter to Sir George. It's rather long (*smoothing out half-a-dozen sheets of paper on her lap*), but it's a good letter.

LADY HONORIA: Shall I read it?

LADY LAUNCESTON (*still smiling*): No; I'll read it myself. It's a good letter. (*Clearing her throat.*) "My dear Sir George, I have executed your commission, and your man is John Wilkinson, who brings this letter as an introduction. Let me know that you cordially endorse my choice. I tried him highly, as Launceston would say, and he proved himself good in good company. I saw little Lord Pomeroy first. He is a martyr to his ideas of behaviour. And like so many martyrs, he refuses to be alone in his martyrdom. All around him

suffer. He came too early, stayed too long, and was too polite to answer any question coherently. Then I saw my nephew, Harry de Beauvoir. I have spelt his name as he spells it, but poor dear old Sir Henry always called himself Beaver. Harry told me that he should be p-r-rofoundly g-r-ratified to work under so capable an administ-r-rator and so r-re-ma-r-rkable a pe-r-rsonality as Sir George Garnett. He rolls his r's entirely out of deference to his Norman name. He congratulated me on having selected him, and you on having secured him, before I had put my test questions to him, and bade me good-bye with a Spanish proverb which I couldn't quite understand, but think was indelicate. I saw also Tommie.

MRS BYWATER: I had great difficulty in getting him to come to you.

LADY LAUNCESTON (*continuing*): "His other name doesn't matter, for I am not sending him to you. He is an Etonian, and, I believe, educated. He said that if the old Johnnie (that's you) didn't want him before October, he would face the music. He fears he is not up to your form, but if you like to put your money on him, he will start in the autumn, and give you a run for it.

MRS BYWATER (*placidly*): That's not so outrageous, for him.

LADY LAUNCESTON (*continuing*): "Then I saw John Wilkinson, whom I have chosen for you. He has been personally known to me for a long time. He had a distinguished career at Cambridge, is earning nothing to speak of in the cleverest way imaginable at the bar, and there is no reason why he should not be equally successful in the world of diplomacy. His views upon

Church matters, smoking before ladies, the licence of the Press, and the House of Lords are admirably sound. His answers to my questions showed me that his opinions were identical with my own—and, as you know them, I need say no more.” (*Pauses.*)

MRS BYWATER: A charming letter, dear Lady Launceston!

LADY LAUNCESTON: Oh! there’s a postscript. It’s a little premature, but I thought I might say it. I have said that he will shortly make a brilliant marriage.

LADY HONORIA: Mamma! I don’t think you should have done that.

MRS BYWATER: Do you mean to say that you have settled it all for the poor young fellow already?

LADY LAUNCESTON: The girl—No. But the fact, as you see—Yes.

(*Enter servant with two letters, one for Lady Launceston and one for Lady Honoria.*)

LADY LAUNCESTON: From Sir George! (*Running her eye hastily down the note.*) He’s quite satisfied. So that’s settled, Honoria!

LADY HONORIA (*without looking up from her letter*): Yes, mamma.

LADY LAUNCESTON: You had better write to Miss Griffiths and Mr Wilkinson to-night. Dinner, and a box afterwards at some silly burlesque, I think. Fix the earliest day we have vacant.

LADY HONORIA: Yes, mamma.

LADY LAUNCESTON (*imitating her daughter*): Yes, mamma! Really, Honoria, you say nothing but “Yes, mamma.” Don’t you take any interest in John Wilkinson’s future?

LADY HONORIA : Yes, mamma.

MRS BYWATER (*rising*) : Then I must leave you to hatch your plots together ; lucky young man !

LADY LAUNCESTON : Going already ! My dear Mrs Bywater—but wait a moment. I must come down and show you my portrait ; we've hung it in the dining-room. I should like to hear what you think of it. Tommie recommends me to put it in the kitchen to frighten the beetles.

(*Exeunt Lady Launceston and Mrs Bywater.*)

LADY HONORIA (*alone, glancing towards door*) : Yes, mamma. (*Reads letter.*)

“DEAREST LITTLE HONOR,

“All is fair in love, and I did precisely as you told me. I came punctually, and in my smartest frock. In fact, I was afraid I had rather overdressed the part. I answered your admirable mother's questions quite gravely, in the very words that you advised, and the questions were exactly what you said they would be. Your little quibble—that smoking before ladies could not be discussed until a definition of ‘ladies’ was forthcoming—settled the business for me. Sir George could hardly go against Lady Launceston's choice, and I am his secretary. They tell me I am a made man. Now, dearest, you know what that means, don't you ? It means that I shall wait no longer for you. No longer. I claim you now.

“Good-night, sweetheart, J. W.”

(*Enter Lady Launceston.*)

LADY LAUNCESTON : Honoria ! If you can tear yourself away from that letter a moment to listen to me, I shall be obliged. I want you to write to Miss Griffiths.

LADY HONORIA (*looking up*) : Yes, mamma. I'm going to—and to Mr Wilkinson.

LADY LAUNCESTON: Not, of course, that I'm a match-maker. I'm an honest workman, and I want to make a thoroughly good job of what I've begun. I've started making John Wilkinson's fortune, and I want to complete it. His present opportunity offers him much, but if he had wealth and aristocratic connections, there is nothing that he might not do. And he must marry them. And I am going to see that he does so. And I believe he will.

LADY HONORIA (*folding up her letter into a very small compass and putting it into a very small purse as she walks to the escritoire*): So do I, mamma.

THE LIFE-MEMBER

THE Junior Palladium Club is a flourishing institution now, its Gothico-Victorian façade, and its cheap house-dinner having gained for it many members to whom its quasi-political origin was a matter of complete indifference. The Junior Palladium Club at this moment has a long waiting-list, a prohibitive entrance fee, and a nicely selected cellar; while the old Palladium—even the dull, stately Palladium, Smirke's masterpiece of imitation—is said to have suffered from the popularity of its younger namesake. But matters were different not so very long ago, when the Junior Palladium, at this day so sturdy of growth, was but a sapling, and the story which follows tells of a crisis in its infantine health.

The Junior Palladium was designed primarily to save the Empire from the machinations of a great political party. Its mission, as defined by its promoters, was to formulate procedures and publish programmes in opposition to this party; to keep the country fully informed as to its short-sightedness, venality, and mendacity; and to provide a convenient rallying spot for those engaged in such salutary labour. These aims, despite their nobility, did not prove immediately attractive, and the total of adherents was at first small; which was a severe blow to the promoters, who had expected a rush of patriots, and who knew perfectly well that if their club was to secure a position of any political importance, it must be by the force of quantity, and not by the intellectual or social

quality of its members. How, then, to secure the rush? To induce the necessary crowd to rally in support of the movement, reasons which would commend themselves to prudent pockets must be present. The wise citizen has his stomach to think of as well as his duty to the constitution; nor will he allow his stomach to be fêted at too great an expense, but expects a happy blend of luxury and economy. As it is only when great numbers have been enlisted that it is possible for a club to provide first-class club comforts at third-class restaurant prices, the early position of the Junior Palladium was somewhat of a problem. If you had numbers you could have economy, but it was necessary to have the economy before you could secure the numbers.

After making this point with his usual lucidity at a meeting of the committee, Mr Mark Umfreville, the leading spirit in their preliminary counsels, propounded his scheme for the creation of life-members. Mr Umfreville was a cadet with aspirations. As purely an adventurer as though he had taken his plausibility, his knowledge of men, and his empty purse to a new mining centre, he remained among his friends, and dug into society with his pick-axe. Now in this stratum, now in that, flitting from Throgmorton Avenue to the Bachelors', from a first night at a variety theatre to a luncheon-party in honour of a colonial bishop, from Ranelagh to Cowes, from Homburg to Argyllshire, he contrived to turn up enough ore to enable him to live as befitted one born so near the governing classes as the younger son of a respectable baronet. But he felt the insecurity of his position, and possibly was a little tired of a perpetual digging that had too much in common with begging. He wished to be settled and to have a career, and his desires had fixed

themselves upon Parliament. He believed that he had it in him to serve his country so nobly from the back benches that in time he would be rewarded by some little post, some substantial if unimportant permanency, that would permit him to lay aside his pick-axe. But he knew that a good start was imperative, and he had neither money to spend in contesting hopeless seats, nor any particular knowledge of affairs such as might lead a constituency to woo him for his merits. Against these disabilities he ranged his alertness of wit and abundance of self-esteem, and decided that he would become the moving spirit of a political club. For if in this way he could lead certain influential wire-pullers to believe that some five thousand fervent voters would have wavered in their convictions, and even gone over to the foe, had he not swooped down upon them, and, by enrolling them in the Junior Palladium, secured them for the party which alone could bring salvation to the Empire—if he could do this, he could establish a claim upon the gratitude of great leaders. Then he might become that enviable person—the man for whom something must be done. And he had determined what that something should be when the time arrived. It should be an introduction, as the choice of the great leaders, to a safe suburban constituency, whose suffrages he could seek at no greater expense to himself than the cost of his hansom cab.

Such were Mr Umfreville's little ambitions, for the realisation of which the success of the Junior Palladium was the first necessity. And that success he intended to secure by his plan for the enrolling of life-members. Cash, he pointed out to the promoters, with the pathetic conviction of one who had never possessed it, was the only essential. With it they might succeed; without it they

must fail. He proposed, therefore, to elect five hundred life-members into the club at the moderate figure of thirty pounds a man, and to spend on current expenses the fifteen thousand pounds thus obtained. With fifteen thousand pounds, judiciously squandered, he calculated that it ought to be easy to snare five thousand gentlemen at five guineas per annum as ordinary members, and that was all that was required to make the club a financial triumph and a powerful factor in imperial politics. With regard to the five hundred life-members, on whom these splendid prospects depended, Mr Umfreville asked his confederates, or, to be more civil, his colleagues on the committee, to leave them to him. "I know a good many fellows," he said; "and some of them are the sort of fellows that what they do, other fellows have to do the same, don't you know? And a good many of these fellows will join, when I put it to them; and, of course, there'll be the usual commission just to keep me up to the scratch. Well? So you'd better just leave it all to me!" When he said that the usual commission was twenty-five per cent., the committee did not know enough to contradict him; and when he brought in by tens and twenties most of the desired life-members, they were too grateful to be critical. For with the addition of these gentlemen to its list, the club gained in numbers in a way that seemed magical to them, until the fears of failure that had lately haunted them gave way to justly roseate hopes. For some few weeks their old apprehensions had power to compel them to wander round the rooms shutting the ink-bottles lest the fluid should evaporate and groaning over the consumption of stationery, but the most timid among them soon saw that serious reason for their fears was gone. And when Mr

Umfreville noted among his new life-members the name of Major Bradenham, he began to compose exordiums and perorations in preparation for a parliamentary career. For Major Bradenham's good fortune in being associated only with speculations of happy event was proverbial.

It was just as the trend towards prosperity became so marked, and consequently at the most critical moment in the well-being of the club, that Major Bradenham paid his first visit to its premises. The occasion was memorable and extraordinary.

It was about four o'clock on a warm Sunday afternoon early in June that the occupants of the enormous windows in the smoking-room of the Junior Palladium might have seen, slowly sauntering along the southern side of Piccadilly—the side where the planes of the Green Park throw a little shadow on a broad pavement—a squad of men clad in workhouse garb. For the most part they were old and feeble, and the look on their faces was one of decent resignation. There was no pain if there was no pleasure in their lives, and this neutrality of emotion was reflected in their countenances. Some had fallen far to reach their present plight, while for others life in the workhouse represented the high level of luxury; but for each and all there was nothing left in life worth expecting. For the inhabitant of the workhouse is but rarely in temporary trouble, and it is not usual for him to anticipate future prosperity. Whether old or young, whether sick or strong, one thing is as certain as anything may be in this world—that he will remain a social failure, and of this he is usually well assured, and the knowledge of it abides with him and colours, or rather decolorises, his every thought and act.

Two men walked a few paces ahead of this depressing group, though their costume proved their association with it. One of these was immediately noticeable in that he had not the slouching gait of his companions. Erect and precise, he walked with even measured paces, and surveyed the scene with an eye from which curiosity had not yet disappeared. This was Major Bradenham, a man of unblemished character and unexceptionable lineage, whose recent acceptance of the invitation given to him by the Junior Palladium Club to become a life-member had been so gratifying to Mr Mark Umfreville. There are some people—indeed, it is the usual case—whose affairs admit of a little mystification. They can cheat themselves, even if they have no desire to cheat those to whom they are indebted. There are securities to be realised here and there which may result in a better return than could have been anticipated; there are little reversions direct and contingent; there are trustees who may obtain powers to come to the rescue; there are friendly creditors who may withdraw their claims temporarily; there are a hundred and one things that may hide from debtors and creditors alike the grim fact that ruin is irretrievable. But with poor Major Bradenham there had been no room for doubt. His story was an exceedingly simple one. He had retired from the army with a pension. Secure in the possession of this he had proceeded to gamble on the Stock Exchange. He met with success, and commuted his pension that he might extend his operations with his increased capital. Soon he possessed a large sum of money, difficult perhaps to realise but none the less a substantial fortune. His investments being mainly in sporting securities, he disregarded dividends, and lived on his continually augmenting

capital with great comfort, and made many friends. Suddenly there came a run against several of his holdings, notably against Wallabys. He was obstinate, and believed in his star. When Wallabys were quite low he sold Hartbeests, and bought more Wallabys with both hands, thinking to recoup himself. But Wallabys went out altogether, while Hartbeests rose. Now he had always believed in Hartbeests, so he pledged his credit in every direction, and bought back Hartbeests. They, too, went out, and this repetition of the worst possible luck unnerved him. He had no experience in losing; for, hitherto, it had been his unvarying lot to win. He got angry and bewildered, and did foolish things. In a month he was a poor man. In two months he was at the end of his tether. The crash was a perfectly honourable one, and his ruin remained entirely unsuspected. He paid his debts as they occurred, and when his stock was valueless he recognised that he was penniless, and ceased from speculating. On a review of the situation, all his liabilities being discharged absolutely, he found that there remained to him some twenty pounds in the bank, and three pounds ten in his pocket. A survey of his unassuming chambers told him that his capital would not be much increased by the sale of his effects. In short, he could pay his way for a month, possibly a little longer. But then? He was not actually friendless, and he possessed numberless club acquaintances and several distant relatives, but there was no one among them to whom he could look for help, and from whom he would have accepted it had it been offered. His many hostesses in London knew nothing more of him than that he had held a commission in a good regiment, and had been afterwards very successful in the city—to which latter fact he owed their

invitations. There were country houses at which he would occasionally sojourn for a local race-meeting or a big shoot, but their owners' intimacy with him was limited to their cognizance that he was a member of a first-class service club, and did not swagger or pose as a shikari. Scattered up and down the face of the globe there were a few old soldiers who could have vaguely recalled him, if he had been obtruded upon their memories, as a good fellow. To the rest of the world he was unknown. If he had died he would have left no appreciable gap; and when he went under financially no man missed him, for he owed no man anything.

Major Bradenham, as soon as he understood his position, came to the conclusion that there were but two courses open to him—to obtain employment as a club secretary, or to apply for admission to the workhouse. A third course, that of living on his excellent credit for a little time, while he tempted fortune again, he resolutely rejected. The workhouse being available at any time he gave prior attention to a search for a secretaryship, and spent his days in answering advertisements, in concocting them, and in keeping appointments. Before the month that remained to him had expired he had discovered that all such posts, as far as he was concerned, could be divided into two classes, the worthless and the valuable. In the former case, capital was demanded of the secretary: he must have money to invest in the club, and the younger the club the more money was required. In the latter case, special experience was expected, and Major Bradenham's experience of club management was just as long and deep as his purse. So one morning he went quietly to the workhouse, and there he had been for a space of three months, when we find him walking up Piccadilly at the head of his dreary comrades.

Hopelessness had bred in him by this time a certain toleration of his environment, and though he had not caught the characteristic crawling gait, he was rapidly sinking into the workhouse apathy. The sight of Piccadilly, however, roused him from his pernicious drowsiness of will. He had never strayed so far west before, for his "house" was some two miles away; and the sight of the clubs, the park, and the palaces stirred his memory, and painted a flickering spot upon each wan cheek. His whole being was moved, not violently but sadly, as a man may be moved by the sight of the grave of a friend whom he remembers tenderly rather than regrets bitterly.

"I expect they have the best of everything to smoke in there, sir," said his companion, an over-speculative linen-draper, pointing to one of the clubs. The two had fraternised in common defence against their rougher comrades, and the major had permitted the linen-draper to address him as "sir," while protesting against the absurdity of his doing so. "It makes me think of other and happier days," pleaded the linen-draper, who had led a life of laborious struggle, which was finally crowned with hopeless insolvency, but who loved to recall, with much verbosity, that he had been a tradesman in the city, and had expended vast sums on rent and taxes before his credit had finally perished beneath the burdens laid upon it.

"Yes," said the major; "the best."

"Now, when you were a toff," continued the linen-draper, with a comprehensive wave of his hand towards the other side of the road, "I suppose you were free of all those places?"

"I suppose so," said the major, remembering that at

one time or another he had known someone in every club in London that was worth belonging to.

At this moment they reached the pavement before the Junior Palladium, at whose front of gleaming stone, multi-coloured marble, and shimmering glass, the linen-drafter for a moment lost his speech. The great block was the realisation of his wild dreams of the emporium that would be his when energy and enterprise were rewarded by success, and for a moment his fluency deserted him.

"My word!" he said at length, and drawing a deep sucking breath; "my word, sir, there's a place! There were only pokey little old houses on that side when I came this way before. What's that? I suppose, now, the Prince of Wales would belong to that one — what?"

"Possibly," replied the major, without much conviction in his voice. "It's the Junior Palladium." Then he smiled, suddenly recalling that the Junior Palladium was his own club still, for he was a life-member. He remembered meeting a young man in a big country-house who had made a great point of enrolling him as a perpetual supporter of the club, and to whose importunities he had eventually given way; for in those days the thirty pounds had seemed of infinitely little consequence, while it had been ever difficult for the major to disappoint anyone when the more obliging course was within his means. Undoubtedly he was still a member, and his smile broadened into an involuntary laugh as he assured himself that he had a right to stroll up the delicately mottled staircase, and to expect that when he reached the topmost step the tall footmen would swing open the great doors beside which they lolled, and that the benign person of aristocratic appearance who acted as hall-porter, and whose silver hair and gold spectacles were just visible

over the mahogany framework of his pen, would give him a kindly greeting. The major was not without humour, and, as he looked up, down, and along the Junior Palladium, he thought it laughable that he, the guest of the workhouse, should be a part proprietor in such a palace, with rights over the magnificent creatures, who, even as he was thinking of them, could be seen bending low at the entrance of a member. He wondered if his life-membership were an available asset, and whether the parish, if the matter came to the ears of the authorities, could make the club disgorge his fee, and use it to defray expenses incurred on his behalf. It seemed to him that this should be possible, as it was clear that he would never be able to get any personal enjoyment out of his membership. That was certain. He would never again have money enough to make it possible for him to enter a club—never.

Now, while the major was thus firmly insisting upon the impossibility that he should again enter any club, he became aware of a crazy impulse rising in his bosom and urging him up the steps of the Junior Palladium. He fought against the foolishness of such a proceeding, and had beaten it down, when his companion's next words gave renewed and overpowering strength to it. The linen-draper had been observing the salaams of the footmen.

"Ah! it's all very well when you're up in the world," said he; "those fellows will bow to you then. But I'd like to see how they'd behave to you if you went in there now."

The major at once crossed the street, and strode up the steps. The portly footmen did not move. They only gaped curiously at him through the glass panels of the swing-doors.

"Open the door!" shouted the major, throwing out his chest, and dilating his pauper garb.

"Here! None of this!" said one of the footmen, pulling the handles inwards, and speaking aggressively through the crack caused by his action.

"You ass!" said the major, rapping on the glass with his knuckles. "I'm a member, you ass!" Then he added, mendaciously, "It's a bet."

At this moment the departure of a member of the club necessitated the opening of the doors, and, as they were held apart on either side, the major stepped briskly in. He had never been in the club before; but, being wound up for his adventure, he did not allow any topographical uncertainties to trouble him. Giving a little nod to the silver-haired porter in passing, he strolled slowly into the first large room on his right hand, which he guessed would prove to be the smoking-room. The footmen, who had followed him as he made this audacious raid on the premises, looked inquiringly from his receding back to their immediate superior, the venerable porter. That great functionary at first could only look inquiringly back at the footmen. He was breathless with surprise.

"What's this game?" he stuttered at last; "what's this game, letting in workhouse people about the place as if they were toffs? Go and chuck him out; and look slippy, I tell you."

"But, Jim—" began one of the footmen.

"But Jim!" mimicked the porter, stumbling into a pun; "what are you butting about, you silly goat? If the secretary sees that fellow, he'll chuck you out as well as him—and me too, perhaps, for not looking after you. Are you going?" This last in raised tones as he noticed the hesitation on the men's faces.

"But, Jim," began one of them again, "he said he was a member."

"He's fit for a member of a club, ain't he?" rejoined Jim, scornfully. "And you're fit for a lunatic asylum. Go and throw him out this moment. Are you afraid?"

"Easy, Jim, easy! He said it was a bet."

"Oh, said it was a bet, did he? That's different," allowed the porter, some of the anxiety clearing from his plump and amiable features. "It's all right, then. Well, this place wants cheering. Why, the last club I was at, I remember Lord John Crosbie, that's the Marquis of Stockport now, coming into the club dressed like a girl! And he went up into the billiard-room and began taking off his clothes. And an old member that was up there alone screamed, and a waiter ran in and was for turning Lord John out, and Lord John strikes the waiter, and the waiter hits Lord John back a sight harder. Then the old member suddenly sides with the distressed female. 'Coward!' says he to the waiter, and lands him over the head with the brass-topped jigger! Then the secretary came, and Lord John and the old member dined together, and they each gave the waiter a sovereign. Now, that was for a bet!"

While the hall-porter was holding his subordinates spellbound with his reminiscences, the major reached the smoking-room; and, as he seated himself and took up a paper, all conversation ceased in his vicinage, and all eyes were fastened upon him. The room was enormous, forming the complete ground-floor of the club, so that what passed at one end caused but little stir at the other; but gradually all present became aware, firstly, of the curious hush that was prevailing in the corner where the major was sitting, and secondly, of the quaint figure,

whose remarkable garb was apparent below and on either side of the journal in which its owner was absorbed. "It's an escaped convict!" said one. "It's a lunatic!" said a second. "He's drunk!" said a third. Then arose the questions of who should be sent for, the doctor, the police, the keeper, or the ambulance. Finally a member summoned the secretary.

The secretary came in, and walked hastily up to the major's chair. He believed that his club was being disgraced by becoming the scene of an inebriate's senseless joke, and it was with the roughness of justly offended authority that he inquired, "What does all this mean, sir?"

"I am Major Bradenham," replied the offender, civilly. "I suppose my clothes prompt your questions?"

The name was familiar to the secretary. A Major Bradenham was undoubtedly a life-member. He had been invited to become so by a holograph letter from the respectable marquis who acted as president of the club under the direction of Mr Umfreville, and Mr Umfreville had vouched for his suitability. The secretary distinctly remembered that the major had been described as a man of fashion and great wealth. If this masquerader were indeed he, it would be an unwise thing to be too abrupt. The marquis might be annoyed; and, worse still, Mr Umfreville might be annoyed also. The pregnant word "bet" had already reached the secretary's ears, and he knew that in certain circles the exigencies of a wager were held to account fully for social solecisms. Yet it was a dreadful thing to have a man in the livery of the poor-law seated in the big smoking-room of the club, the observed of all eyes. The room was full of members, and worse, of guests, and the secretary could

imagine the disagreeable and slighting gossip that would prevail, and that might even get into the scurrilous columns of the political press. He could see the headlines in certain inimical prints describing in ribald language the new adherent to the party whose headquarters the Junior Palladium was. The club could afford to incur such unfortunate publicity even less than it could afford to quarrel with a man in a prominent position in the financial and social worlds. The secretary remained standing near the major, torn with doubts whether he should order the expulsion of the intruder, or retreat from the unpleasant situation and trust to the story going no further and being universally discredited. Suddenly the major rose, and crossed the room to the big bow-window, taking a toothpick from a wine-glass in his transit. There he stood, watched by all within, and a conspicuous object for the attention of all without. The secretary followed, and what he saw proved an aggravation to his apprehensions. On the pavement in front of the club stood a dozen or so hapless men in workhouse clothes, whose eyes were all fixed on the figure in the bow-window, while their faces were wrung into grimaces of surprise and amusement. Then one of them—it was the linen-drafter—waved an old piece of red handkerchief towards the major as he was posed in the window, and immediately the whole group broke into clumsy gestures of recognition. Major Bradenham removed his toothpick with rounded arm and little finger elegantly separated from its fellows, while he recognised his acquaintance without by a magnificent bow. At this the acquaintance fell to face-making yet more vigorously in their appreciation of the situation, and the major bowed repeatedly, and with increased cordiality. It

was not to be expected that so singular an episode should escape the notice of passers-by. First one and then another stroller paused and looked from the figures on the pavement to the figure in the window, and in a minute the nucleus of a crowd was formed.

Mr Mark Umfreville had one quality which stamped him as an organiser. He was always at hand when he was wanted. Therefore it was inevitable that, at the moment when the secretary's embarrassment was most acute, at the moment when the order for the forcible expulsion of the major was about to be pronounced, Mr Umfreville should step into the room. From far away in a little attic, which in defiance of the prejudices of other members of the committee he had consecrated to Sunday whist, he had smelt trouble, and with no particular object save to satisfy his unreasonable uneasiness, he had decided to descend and look about him.

"He says he's a member," said the secretary, advancing to meet Umfreville, and indicating with a backward gesture the bowing figure in the window, around whom the more curious of those present had clustered.

"So he is," said Umfreville; "it's old Bradenham! What on earth is he doing in that rig?"

"Well, I don't know. There's some story of a bet, I believe. But he's bowing and nodding away to a group of his friends in the same sort of clothes. They are on the pavement opposite, and bowing back. If it isn't stopped it will play the deuce with the club, I tell you. There's a crowd collecting already."

"We're rather a young shop, certainly," assented Umfreville; "and if some of the papers got hold of the thing they might work a racket against us. That's the

worst of being a political club, the more friends you have the more enemies you have."

"Of course, if it's being done for a bet——"

"Depends entirely who the man is betting with," cut in Umfreville. "If he's betting with a bishop, or a music-hall singer, or a gold-king, or some really important person we needn't interfere; and I'll write a paragraph myself about his eccentricity and send it round to a news-agency. But I rather doubt the bet story, as it does not account for the gentlemen on the pavement."

"Well, any way, what are we going to do now?" asked the secretary. "He can't stay there. Hadn't I better have him run out of the place, and chance it?"

"I'll speak to him," said Umfreville, advancing to the window. "Major Bradenham, I believe?" he commenced.

"Yes, sir," said the major.

"Had the pleasure of meeting you at Lord Norwich's, I think? Glad to see you in here. Often come in? Good sort of place, isn't it?"

"It seems to me an excellent institution," said the major.

"Glad you think so," continued Umfreville. "I want to speak to you quietly about it—quietly," he repeated, looking at the circle of interested spectators, and allowing an eyelid to flicker as he met the gaze of one or two. Umfreville was well known to everyone in the club as being in himself the management personified, and as his wish was easy to interpret he found himself immediately alone with the major.

"Very glad you like the place," he went on; "we've done our best, and, of course, we're particularly anxious to please our best members—men, that is, who belong to other clubs and who know how things should be done.

What's good enough for them is sure to be too good for the others."

"I do not at the present moment belong to any other club," said the major.

"No?" said Umfreville. "Well, that should make you all the more interested in this one. Let's sit down." And as he spoke he drew the major from his conspicuous position in front of the window. "I dare say you'll smoke, and may I order you anything to drink? A little whisky and soda?"

Major Bradenham nodded. His whole being had been yearning for the good tobacco and delicate spirits which were being consumed around him, but which the emptiness of his pocket had prevented him from tasting.

For a few minutes both men sat in silence. The major puffed slowly at a large Rothschild, letting the aromatic fumes, made a thousandfold more ravishing to his senses by recent abstention, play round his nostrils. Umfreville now and again gave a little side-wag of his head towards other occupants of the room and smiled as he did so, by which by-play he contrived to convey the impression that he was satisfied to be in the company in which he was—that, in fact, he found it amusing and piquant. The rumour that the gentleman in pauper garb was a well-known society man who had disguised himself for a bet accordingly gained credence, and the members who had recently muttered ominously of keepers and constables now, in their gratitude to this smart personage for choosing the premises of their club for his aristocratic freaks, began to moot the advisability of asking the mysterious stranger to dinner.

At length Umfreville began, "Does that cigar suit you? Is that stuff as you drink it? Quite sure? Then, please

listen, Major! My fortunes are bound up in the fortunes of this club. Now, your joke in coming here in those odd clothes may do those fortunes harm. I shouldn't wonder if a lot of members resigned."

"But I haven't any other clothes to wear," said the major.

"I thought so," returned Umfreville, "I thought the get-up was too good for private theatricals. Well, Major Bradenham, you won't do it again, will you? I've saved you from being thrown out this time, and I'm sure I'm devilish sorry for you, but, you know, you can't come in here. You can't indeed." And Umfreville leant back, and closed his mouth tightly, as one who had said the last word that was to be said.

"Nonsense!" said the major, to whom fragrant tobacco and old whisky had lent courage for argument. "I'm a life-member. I shall come in when I like, and that will be whenever I can."

"H'm!" said Umfreville, "you oblige me to be rude. I shall tell the secretary to instruct the servants to exclude you."

"I shall come when I like, Mr er—er—I don't remember your name," returned the major. "I have an invitation from your president. I have paid my money. I have done nothing for which I can be excluded. And there's no rule about what clothes a member must wear. Why, look at that!" He pointed to a young gentleman who had lounged into the room in a shiny top-hat, a grey frock-coat, a plaid waistcoat, a pink shirt, and yellow boots.

"Shocking!" assented Umfreville; "shocking! The place is full of bounders, I grant you. For which very reason that awful youth doesn't offend the prejudices of

our members. They know no better. But they won't stand your clothes. So, drink up your whisky and let's part friends. It's ridiculous to say we cannot exclude you. A bankrupt is excluded *ipso facto* under one of the club rules."

"But I am not a bankrupt," said the major. "I haven't a debt in the world. It is true that my only asset is my life-membership of this club, but I intend to make that asset go as far as it will."

"I think we can keep you out, sir," said Umfreville, a little testily. As a matter of fact, he was beginning to have doubts, and to foresee trouble.

"I think not," returned the major; "and I am sure that your attempt, for which I will give you as frequent opportunities as possible, will not do the club any good."

"H'm!" said Umfreville, after a pause; "H'm! What do you want?"

"Pretty well everything," replied the major, who began to see that his threat that he would work his life-membership as an available asset had not been quite an idle one.

"No friends?"

"None that I would sponge on," said the major.

"No vices?"

"I have gambled a little."

"H'm!" said Umfreville again. "But it must have been a sudden smash? Why, I met you at Beaminster after Christmas, and saw you dining at the Savoy a month after that! Didn't you make any sort of attempt to slide down gradually?"

"No; I could have done secretary's work but no one would employ me. I was too old. I could do nothing

else. And I dreaded sliding. So I jumped over the edge." And the major told his story briefly.

When he had done speaking, the two men looked at each other steadily.

"You're not fooling?" said Umfreville. "I can grub about in your past as much as I like, and I shall find only a few unlucky speculations?"

"You can. But if you're going to give me a chance, don't be long. For Heaven's sake, man, now that you've raised my hopes, don't be long in trying me."

"I'll try you to-morrow," said Umfreville. "Here's a tanner; and you can make certain of this, if I didn't believe you I wouldn't give you twopence. I am not a charitable man. Turn up at luncheon in nineteenth-century costume, about two. By the way, in case I'm asked, who was your bet with?"

"The Prince of Wales," said the major.

"I knew it," said Umfreville.

"The truth is," said Mr Umfreville to an emergency meeting of the committee on the following morning; "we can't afford to play. The stakes are too high, and Major Bradenham has big trumps. He has an unblemished character, and doesn't owe a shilling in the world. And he paid enormous losses on the Stock Exchange in full, and without a moment's delay, going cheerfully to the workhouse that he might keep his engagements to the letter. I rather think that poverty of that sort does not exclude a man from a club, who has actually paid his subscription. There is no rule against a member of the club being supported out of the rates, and we certainly can't frame sumptuary laws which shall be binding—retrospectively binding, mind you—on our members.

We've got to compromise. Eh? Jackson, don't you think so?"

Mr Jackson, the chairman of the committee, was the wealthiest man in the club. He was not very clever but he was clever enough to know his own limitations, and Umfreville's polysyllables sounded to him to cover a policy of some sort, with which he had better agree lest he should be compelled to discuss it in detail.

"Yes, certainly," said Mr Jackson; "we must compromise."

Jackson, the wealthy, and Umfreville, the astute, made a combination of opinion before which the committee were happy to bow; and it was unanimously decided that terms must be made with Major Bradenham, to prevent him from damaging the club by a persistence in his inconvenient conduct of the previous afternoon. Some men proposed this, and others that. Some suggested taking counsel's opinion, and others thought that the noble president of the club should be consulted, while Umfreville waited until a badly conducted debate had made everyone ready for a definite and comprehensible plan of action.

"I vote," said he, "that whatever we do, we get our money's worth out of him. I propose we make him a sort of assistant secretary, and give him a bedroom, meals, and say, two pounds a week, and keep up his subscription for him at his other clubs. A smart man like Major Bradenham, a really smart man who goes to Beaminster and Lord Norwich's, can do us a lot of good if he gives his mind to it. He can write on our note-paper to people who never heard of us, and he can get men here to dinner whom we know nothing of. I believe that's the best we can do, and if it doesn't pay us we can easily change our minds and send him off. Eh, Jackson?"

"Certainly," agreed Mr Jackson. "We can always sack him."

And so, when the major arrived a little later to eat his luncheon with Mr Umfreville, he found the offer of the committee awaiting him.

"I can never thank you enough," he said to his host, as he read the letter.

"Oh, bosh!" said that gentleman. "When you can help me, I'll let you know. By the way, as you are to have your meals free, we'll put this little function down to the general expenses of the club, and have another bottle of eighty-four."

MR FISCHER, THE PHOTOGRAPHER

THE Jubilee of the Emperor of Wettin was to be celebrated with extraordinary pomp and emphasis. All the Governments of the world were announced to be sending their representatives to Blabenberg, there to do honour to the aged monarch who, amid the changes and chances of imperial life, had remained the choice of his people as well as their destiny for fifty full years.

For autocrats saw in the Emperor's power, as constitutional rulers saw in his moderation, and as republics saw in his love of righteousness, a justification of each separate scheme of government. Wettin might be foe or friend to this state or that in the realm of politics, and might differ from this state or that as broadly in religion as in diet, in literature as in complexion; but those responsible for the conduct of affairs under these varied climes and conditions were all able to find in the position of the Emperor of Wettin proof that good administration must result in national prosperity, and that the safe throne is the throne reared upon the solid base of the universal affection of the people. With the onus upon them of showing before the world that they were the best governed country, and with the desire to testify to their Emperor that he was as much loved as he was respected—with such a mission before them, can it be wondered that the people of Wettin approached the week of Jubilee with passionate excitement?

And as the great day drew nigh upon which it was

appointed that the Emperor, escorted by the accredited nobles and notables of all the nations, should drive through his magnificent capital, Blabenberg, to render public thanks at the Cathedral of St Severus for the glorious reign that had been vouchsafed him, this excitement waxed. It waxed to such a height that we cannot even outline into what excesses a naturally restrained folk might have been hurried, had not a practical vent been found for fermenting feelings in the national passion for joinery. The people of Wettin were born carpenters; and the city of Blabenberg proceeded to work off its exuberance by making arrangements that thousands, nay millions, of people should be able at their ease to view the historic pageant.

Soon the loyalty, the patriotism, and the wealth of Blabenberg alike were displayed by preparations for the day so far-reaching in scope and so ambitious in design that all previous efforts in a similar direction, either by Wettin or by races of more pronounced theatricality, were left in deepest shade. The route through the brown old capital, with its ancient tortuous alleys and its modern spacious boulevards, its historic palaces looking like prisons and its humanitarian prisons resembling palaces, with its squalor and its splendour, its grimness and its unspeakable wealth, was transformed by the carpenter's wand into a scene out of fairy-land. A stalwart army of artisans took possession of the city and proceeded to shape it and drape it, to erect here a terrace and there a tower, to throw up storeys and to suspend balconies from turrets and swings from verandahs—all with admirable zeal and in response to high wages, until the time-honoured metropolis of the West presented a realisation of the many-coloured dreams of an Eastern hedonist.

The great city was in the throes of its regeneration

when there arrived at the principal railway station a young man, whose accent and clothes suggested that he was an alien, although he had a commendable acquaintance with the Wettin language. That he was no stranger in Blabenberg was proved by his familiarity with the few custom-house formalities that were exacted of him, and by the certain tread with which he stepped from the platform into the thronged streets, turning a deaf ear to the offers of assistance that reached him from expectant hackney-carriages. He was a blonde and dapper little man, neatly dressed and unassuming in his carriage, yet bearing himself as one who knew his own worth and whose station in life more frequently entailed upon him the giving than the receiving of orders. As the manager of a retail haberdashery he would have looked in his place, and would have taken care that others respected him in it. Punctuality was marked in plain figures on his decent overcoat, and probity resided in the square toes of his roomy, brown shoes. Yet not a dry-as-dust man, but one of artistic tastes. For, as he gazed through his *pince-nez* with interest at the towering timber-works that were being erected around him, it was easy to determine the meaning of the gentle smile with which he fingered the little portable camera that hung by a strap from his neck, and formed his only luggage. Away from the trivial routine of his business day the man was clearly a photographic enthusiast; and he was calling up a mental picture of the gallant array that would soon be filling the streets with objects for the exercise of his skill in picture-making. What views he would get! And he stopped at the foot of one colossal stand, and looked up and peopled its rows of seats with a mighty crowd rising tier upon tier to the sky-line and all absorbed in the unparalleled scene

below. "It will be something to look at," he said to himself; and smiled again, as he struck into a retired street of mean houses, an oasis of antiquity and shabbiness in a desert of modern and imposing structures.

Stopping before a narrow portal, whose ornate top-light told of departed modishness, he rang at one of several bells fixed to the carved pillar. The summons was immediately answered by a person who must have been expecting him, so prompt was the response.

"Ah!" said a thin, haggard, middle-aged face, peeping through the half-opened door, "'Tis you! Come in, then, before you are seen."

"Always the same, dear friend!" said the younger man, as he stepped inside. "Always the same! Paralysed with apprehension! Yet what need for fear in this grand country? What need, I ask? Are we not two free gentlemen in a free land, my Paul? No passports, no vouchers, no credentials; yet we are made welcome!"

So he chattered, as he followed his friend up the dingy, sour-smelling staircase, paying no heed to the silencing gestures of his guide's raised forefinger and screwed-up lips. And so he continued to chatter on reaching the little chamber immediately beneath the tiles to which the elder man conducted him.

"We are made welcome, I say, in this great country," he continued, "heartily welcome! Not even our mighty King, the great Constantine of Gregoria, whom God preserve—eh! my Paul, whom God preserve—enters this hospitable realm with less exacting formality than you or me, your little friend Fischer."

"So!" said Paul, doubtfully. He was not of the same gay temperament as Mr Fischer, and seemed to resent the joyousness of his junior as presaging some

heedlessness, some irresponsibility ill-assorted to the business in hand.

"Of course," continued Fischer, airily, "my Paul has not been ass enough to offend the prejudices of this mighty nation in whose bosom he now rests, eh? No little trouble at *bézique*, for instance?"—and he tapped a greasy pack of cards on the mantelpiece against which he was lounging. "No stupid games of chance with the patriots of the *tripots*, eh? And, my God, no selling of these?"—taking up with the extreme tips of his fingers a slim volume, whose stained white covers presented illustrations in promise of the contents which they protected.

"No," said Paul, sulkily.

"Well, well," continued Mr Fischer tolerantly, "a man must have his little consolations. The romances had better be kept for solitary contemplation and reading in the closet, while the cards will be most advantageously employed in the artifices of patience. Have you my lens ready?"—this with abruptness, and a glance down at his camera, still suspended from his person.

"Yes."

"Good. Nothing is now wanting but a situation from which I can command a close view of the great Jubilee procession to make my little holiday a successful one. As for you, my Paul, when you have had your dinner it will be well for you to leave Wettin. I do not desire the attention of a constabulary that may at any moment elect to make you the subject of their inquiries. Best of friends, say adieu! Have a good dinner! Be sure and have a good dinner; and drink to our next meeting in Gregoria. Your part is played."

And now the great day has arrived, and the appointed

hour, and the imperial retinue with its unprecedented escort leaves the palace of Blabenberg amid the thundering of guns, the pealing of bells, the blare of trumpets, and the ringing plaudits of an enthusiastic and devoted populace. As the great procession wound slowly out from the grim old fortress where twenty generations of Wettin monarchs have held their court, have been born or buried, crowned or murdered, the sun sprang up from behind a barrier of clouds, and levelling his rays at the advancing horsemen touched every point on head-dress or weapon to brilliancy.

"Oh! Oh!" shouted the people, as the Emperor's Own, the most famous heavy regiment in the Wettin army, lumbered by, their gun-metal helmets, breast-plates, and greaves, and the steaming quarters of their huge black chargers glittering darkly in the sun, and giving them the appearance of fantastic bronzes suddenly galvanised into a gallop. "Ah! ah!" sighed the people, as the graceful First Chasseurs, Princess Ottilie of Wettin's Own, caracolled and curveted along. What elegant springs the little grey horses gave! And how much action they displayed, while careful to cover only a small distance, and to preserve the time and tune of the procession! The pale blue and silver surtouts of their riders from every fold and angle of which streamed love-knots of scarlet, and their light silver casques from which drooped scarlet plumes, made a spectacle so elegant and so delicate that the bystanders sighed to think that such beautiful flowers of peace might be cut down and garnered in the harvests of war.

But the sighs were quickly turned into ringing cheers, as the civic celebrities of Wettin robed in crimson and fur and reclining in their barouches were succeeded by

copper-coloured giants from luscious south-sea isles, by bleached dwarfs from the Antarctic regions, by Nubian troglodytes, and by troopers, hussars, marines, guards, and police from every known quarter of the globe. For Wettin, the great colonising power of the earth, had drawn from all her dependencies specimens of her fighting strength and her pioneering prowess to go before the Emperor and to swell his triumph. And how shall we describe the deafening uproar, the unrestrained, tumultuous shouting of all men, which arose as the Emperor's great gold coach bobbed into sight, swinging this way, swinging that way, in answer to the jerks of its draft of sixteen piebald ponies? Slowly, slowly, the great carriage passed between the eager lines, and the clean-cut face of the aged Emperor was seen white against the purple hangings. White, but not unmoved, for those near could note the convulsive working of the usually stern, still lips, and the tremor of the calm and fearless hand as he raised his fingers now and again to the edge of his triple coronet of emeralds, in military acknowledgment of the enthusiasm of his people. Around the coach pranced a cavalcade of princes. Long-legged, bearded, and debonair, his brown curls flecked with grey, there rode the heir-apparent—his Royal and Imperial Highness, the Grand Duke Gunther of Blabenberg. There rode the grand duke's son, the graceful, chivalrous young Prince of Simmern, third in the secure succession to the Wettin throne. There rode Rai Bahadur Mirza Beg, who traced his succession directly from a man who had turned the legions of Alexander the Great; and with him came the incomparable Florizel, wise, wayward, and polite—a Bohemian prince of humorists, and a laughing-stock among princes. An olive-skinned and alert diplomatist from Persia was

chattering to a mandarin of untold wealth and impassive features, who was clad in a robe of saffron brocade embroidered with green lilies and festooned with ornaments of carved jade, and whose face bore an expression of mild wonder at the enthusiasm which his appearance evoked. Next, and alone, and noticeable among all, rode King Constantine of Gregoria—the great King Constantine, the young King Constantine, the daring, the mad, the arbitrary, the politic, the artistic, the bewildering King Constantine. Clothed from head to foot in thin, black cloth—his freakish, boyish face belied his reputation for state-craft, as his sombre dress contradicted his love of personal display. Those who knew him said that it was like him to attend a festival in a garb fitted for a funeral, while others made the obvious comment that in a parterre of gaudy tulips, a dun fritillary becomes a conspicuous flower. On his breast shone the orders of all nations, and in his hand he carried a light riding-cane, his only weapon when leading his armies to battle. He rode as though in a dream, and muttered as he swayed backwards and forwards in his saddle; but whether he was conning the words of his next song that should entrance Gregorian drawing-rooms, or those of his next telegram that should bring terror and confusion to some neighbouring state, no one will ever know. He was reputed to be no friend to Wettin, so that all the populace rejoiced at the opportunity of displaying their overbrimming loyalty before his eyes. They believed such demonstrations would annoy him seriously, for it was common knowledge that King Constantine had grave trouble in his own land, where he was distrusted by his nobility and his elders, whom he dragooned; while he was hated by the democratic party, and by the young progressive

spirits—to whom he preached sermons upon Socialism of a quite intolerable length and dulness.

“That’s him,” said the spectators, as the solitary figure came in sight. “That’s King Constantine! He dare not ride about his own streets without guards. What must he think of this?” “He has no colonies,” added others, “so what must he think of it?” “Why has he dressed himself for a funeral?” asked others, angrily resenting his sombre attire on such an occasion of gala.

This last question brought an answer from a little man in a tall hat with a mourning band standing in the front row of the crowd and watching the cavalcade, now some twenty paces from him. “King Constantine is a man of remarkable taste,” said Mr Fischer, and he began to unstrap his camera.

Mr Fischer had obtained a very advantageous position from which to view the procession. His good fortune was the result of sustained effort, and not the unearned gift of chance. Twice he had walked round the route, that he might judge for himself at which points the exiguity of the street would bring the crowd into most immediate contact with the spectacle. And not content with merely seeking a standpoint whence he could command a close view of the Emperor, he was careful to study the approaches to it, hoping to reach his selected pitch and depart therefrom with all ease and convenience. Many spots had one or other recommendation, and not a few had both; but Mr Fischer was in his mild way an exacting man. He might not want much, but he knew exactly what he wanted, and was willing to expend infinite pains in securing it. It was late on the eve of the appointed day when he made his choice in a narrow

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thoroughfare, where a somewhat abrupt curve would enjoin a deliberate pace upon horses whose riders and drivers were certain to remember that to be associated with a stumble was to earn abiding dishonour. Into the concavity of this bend ran a little crooked road, leading by inosculation with similar defiles down to the adjacent river. This passage—for it was no more—having no reason except as an approach to counting-houses which would be closed on a general holiday, offered an easy method of approach to the main street. As a medium of retreat, a point concerning which Mr Fischer had also to think—for he was a small man, and a camera is unhandy luggage—the passage was equally well ordered. On either hand rose warehouses, from whose infrequent windows no view could be obtained of aught but the opposing wall, so that no mob of spectators would surge into the narrow interval and obstruct the peaceful evasion of persons entering from this corner. A few yards down this tortuous passage stood an old public-house. Into this Mr Fischer walked with grave countenance. Having washed his hands and ordered a bottle of beer he drank it slowly. He then left the house, much refreshed, if the brighter face which he presented could be relied upon as an index to his feelings. He had found the place he wanted.

On the great day, shortly after dawn, Mr Fischer arrived at the corner of the little passage, and, with much affability, entered into conversation with the officer of the special constabulary who was upon fixed duty at the spot. Mr Fischer spoke of his great enthusiasm for photography, and his readiness, if necessary, to meet death in aiming at good results. The constable was interested and hoped it would never be necessary for Mr Fischer to run such

risks, for even the cause of art could be championed at too great a sacrifice. Mr Fischer trusted that he would get a good view. The constable promised to do his utmost to that end. Mr Fischer wondered if the little street behind would be kept clear, so that he could glide down it as soon as his photographs were taken, for he would have the constable to observe that a camera was an expensive and frail appliance with which to push through a crowd. The constable said that it was his duty to keep the passage clear—at least, he thought so—and that he would keep it clear, he was certain. Whereat Mr Fischer gave the constable a sovereign, “because it is Jubilee Day.”

And now the procession drew nigh. Mr Fischer unslung his camera from his neck and held it balanced in his hand. The ringing shouts came nearer; the quivering, dusty air was full of the strains of martial bands and the thud of horses’ hoofs, and half—two-thirds—three-fourths of the great pageant went by the spot where Mr Fischer stood. The Emperor’s carriage rocked into sight; the cavalcade of princes deployed in front of Mr Fischer, negotiating the little curve with something of military precision.

“Would you mind holding my camera for me?” said Mr Fischer to the obliging constable. “Then I shall be free to pull off the cap.”

“With pleasure,” said the official.

“You are really very kind to me,” said Mr Fischer. “Do you think I might ask the soldier in front of you to bend his head down?”

“Let this man take a photograph, soldier, will you?” said the constable, as he brandished the camera in the air.

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The soldier bent down with a little nod of ready acquiescence.

As King Constantine came opposite the camera, Mr Fischer made an odd, croaking noise in his efforts to say "Now," and suddenly he raised his hand and withdrew the cap. Forthwith there streamed from the short, presenting barrel a tongue of fire, and leapt full into the breast of the great King Constantine, whose death-cry was drowned in the roar of the exploding bomb.

Mr Fischer slipped into the passage behind him and was lost to sight.

The people seized the constable, and the soldiers sabred the people.

"I was fortunate," said Mr Fischer afterwards to his friend Paul. "I did not think that the issue would be so happy, until I found my spot. Then, and for the first time, I realised that it would be possible for me to take a successful photograph of the late King Constantine and live to tell my Paul the story. I had observed that a beer-house, situated a few feet from the top of the alley at whose mouth I intended to stand, was invisible from the main street. I washed my hands in that excellent hostelry and learned that it possessed a back-door which opened into a second street. On the eventful morning I found that back-door locked, and I stole the key. After securing my portrait of King Constantine I beat a swift retreat on the beer-house. In the passage I threw away the long black coat and tall hat with a mourning band, which I had assumed out of compliment to King Constantine. I then unlocked the back-door and emerged in a tweed suit, having extracted a light check cap from one of the pockets.

I locked the back-door behind me, and, as I did so, I could hear my pursuers clattering down the passage. Then I joined the furious crowd by the other street, and became indistinguishable."

"So!" said Paul, "it will be awkward if you meet that policeman."

"The brutal mob killed him," said Mr Fischer.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

MRS WYSE (ELEANOR), 32. MISS OSBORNE (MIRIAM), 20.

Scene: Miriam's Drawing-room. Eleanor has risen to go and Miriam remains lying on a sofa.

ELEANOR: Yes! Yes! You seem to have had a lovely time—and you couldn't possibly look worse for it. You are positively yellow. And now I must be off, dear. Good-bye!—Positively yellow!

MIRIAM: I am *not* yellow. And don't go, Nell. I—er—I want to tell you something. I didn't have a lovely time a bit. At least, it hasn't turned out lovely.

ELEANOR (*sitting down*): Goose! I wasn't going. I knew you hadn't told me all. And you're burning to confess.

MIRIAM: I am not burning to do anything so unnecessary, but I don't mind telling you about it—as you have asked me. I have nothing to confess, for I have done nothing wrong. And if I have, I am punished enough by turning yellow.

ELEANOR: Poor dear! Not yellow exactly—only interestingly pallid. Don't mind about it; and tell me all. Perhaps that will make you rosy again. Shall I help you? I will. You met him down there.

MIRIAM: Him? Who?

ELEANOR: Why, *him*. How should I know his name?

MIRIAM: His name! I wish I'd never found out his horrid name.

ELEANOR: Then you *have* met him. And that's the part of your visit you have not said a word about. But thanks very much, dear, for all the information about the Norfolk coast, and what Colonel Osborne thought of the wine, and what you thought of the air, and what the inhabitants thought of the prospects of the herring-fishing. (*Sweetly.*) So interesting! And what was the matter with his name? You have never refused—that is, allowed yourself to be influenced by the unimportant fact that his name was Scroggins, or Ebenezer?

MIRIAM (*after a pause*): Yes; I have met him. Met him really. But, Nell, if you're going to be smart at my expense, I don't think I can tell you any more.

ELEANOR: Now, my good little Miriam, don't be touchy. Who is your best friend? I have chaperoned you and countenanced you. I have found your luggage for you at railway stations and have given you chocolate at church. I have interviewed for you at least one justly indignant man, and explained that your sweetness of manner was deceptive—and he said it was. I believe he said it was damnably so. I have introduced you to Victorie, who dresses you admirably—when you don't meddle with her. And I have twice persuaded Colonel Osborne to increase your allowance—nominally, at any rate. No! No! You must not be touchy with me.

MIRIAM (*wearily*): You've been very good. Well, he was at our hotel.

ELEANOR: Yes?

MIRIAM: And——(*pauses.*)

ELEANOR: And? (*Miriam does not speak.*) And you caught his eye at *table d'hôte*. And he stared and you very properly looked the other way. And you met him in the corridor the next day three times between breakfast and

luncheon. And the third time you—well, you didn't smile, of course, but you looked as if you could smile. So he bowed—to find out. And in the afternoon he happened to be near you on the parade. So he said that the place was relaxing—or did you tell me bracing?—and that he knew some Osbornes in Yorkshire or the Engadine, and were you any relation to the Duke of Leeds? There! (*breathlessly.*)

MIRIAM: Quite wrong! He only looked at me when he thought I didn't know it. Not that he was shy or awkward—but he was courteous—and good. (*Sitting up on the sofa suddenly.*) Nell, he was the nicest man I ever met—the very nicest.

ELEANOR: H'm! Did you let him know that?

MIRIAM: I dare say I did. I don't care.

ELEANOR: Oh! Have you been foolish? May I go on bothering you about it?

MIRIAM: I have been very wise; and I have done the very thing you would have recommended (*Eleanor takes Miriam's hand*), so I ought not to mind telling you. For you are a regular little mother to me, Nell.

ELEANOR: Well, we'll call it an elder sister. That doesn't make me such a fossil. Now, go on.

MIRIAM: I'm not going to tell you all. I cannot do that. He met papa at the races. Papa won some money from him. And papa asked him to come to our rooms. And he came.

ELEANOR: To see papa?

MIRIAM: He came because he wished to see me, and because he knew that I wished to see him. And—and it was all so different to the silly things that I have told you about before.

ELEANOR: Yes, dear. So very different.

MIRIAM: I saw him every day. And we used to go and walk about the grounds—in the evening. And he was so quiet and kind and strong. And he never talked about other girls. He said he knew some. I asked him, to see what he would say, because it was easy to see he was accustomed to us. He knew little things, and said little things; and he wasn't awkward. But he didn't swagger about girls. And he never worried me by asking me if I liked him as well to-day as I did yesterday, and if I thought I should like him as well to-morrow—and always. Oh! he was different!

ELEANOR: Why, what did you talk about?

MIRIAM: Me, and papa, and how his people wished him to settle down near them, and hunting—at least, *he* did—and all sorts of things, you know.

ELEANOR: Yes; I know. "Ships and shoes and sealing-wax." And are you engaged, dear?

MIRIAM: No. I refused him. And I'm very glad I did. (*Crying.*) He ought to have told me about himself.

ELEANOR: Oh! my poor darling! And he turned out to be a tailor or something! I see it all. You mustn't blame yourself. They're awfully like other people nowadays, and if he was very very rich, why——

MIRIAM: Nell! A tailor! No! He was a gentleman—an honest, good gentleman. I tell you he was the nicest man I ever met. But am I fitted to be a poor man's wife? How many times have you told me that I am not? And papa never says anything else.

ELEANOR: Well, it seems to me that for your own sake, if not for his, you should have thought of his possible poverty sooner.

MIRIAM: I did think about it. But he always seemed so rich. He had the best rooms in the hotel. And he had

his own horses down there. And his sister is Lady Something—Brown, I think. And he never mentioned his brothers. And his father has been high-sheriff. O Nell! I did think about it. And I wish I hadn't. I am ashamed that I should have wondered or cared whether he was rich or poor. For I know now that it doesn't matter a bit. Not a bit!

ELEANOR: Well, my dear?

MIRIAM: Well, when I found out that he was nobody and had been concealing things from me, it was a sort of sudden shock to me. And you've always said that being poor spoils everything. And, of course, I owe Victorie a lot of money. And papa wouldn't let me marry a poor man. And poor mamma! They called it consumption, but you know very well that she was worried to death by papa's debts. So I wrote back and refused him.

ELEANOR: And how did you find him out?

MIRIAM: By his name. Papa said one morning that I was not to be silly, for Mr Crutchley had let out that he was the youngest of the family. And just then his letter came. And he had signed it Guy Octavius—I used to call him Guy—at the end. And he never told me anything about his being Octavius—the youngest of eight, you know. So I wrote back and said that it was impossible. But you have made me a mercenary little beast—you and papa between you. And I'm so miserable.

ELEANOR: Crutchley, did you say? Guy Octavius Crutchley?

MIRIAM: Yes.

ELEANOR: Good gracious, Miriam! Guy Crutchley!

MIRIAM: Yes! Do you know him?

ELEANOR: Perfectly. Almost a millionaire, my dear. And you've refused Guy Crutchley! And because of his

poverty! *His poverty!* Yes; I know him. And one of those sisters of his did marry a Brown. Oh! my poor little dear! It would be laughable, if it wasn't so sad. Won't he come back? (*Miriam shakes her head.*) And he never told you anything about his elder brothers? Concealed them? All seven of them? Oh! he must come back, though he is the youngest of eight. He must.

MIRIAM: He won't. And I'll never ask him. But if he did, I would marry him though he were the youngest of eighty. Nell, you're laughing!

ELEANOR: He must come back! Can't you guess? Yes; though he's the youngest of eight, he must come back. The others are sisters.

MIRIAM (*laughing excitedly*): Well, I'm glad to be punished. I deserve it. He will never come back, and he's nothing to me now. Nothing! But I loved him.

Enter Servant.

SERVANT: Mr Guy Crutchley.

AN ELOPEMENT

I

THE Guildhall School in the market-town of West Deerhurst was an excellent institution of a class that has now largely vanished from among us; for it is more than twenty years ago since the curtain rose on this comedy.

In the sixties and early seventies there were gentlemen in the country who aspired to give their sons an education similar to that which they had themselves received, neither better nor worse. It should comprise of arithmetic—some; of Greek—a religious trifle; of Latin—an epic trifle; of French—sufficient to realise the ridiculousness of the language; and in deportment—the polka, the quadrille, and perhaps the waltz. The French a boy need never learn, and from the classics he could be excused at his parents' wish, but the arithmetic and the deportment were strictly compulsory. To a clever boy or to one for whom larger views were entertained this curriculum was only a preparation; to the majority it served as a complete equipment of learning. The cadets of the county families, the offspring of the professional classes, and the sons of some of the more ambitious farmers comprised the *clientèle*. The headmaster was always a clergyman; and though now and again a butcher's son might obtain admission to the school, a Dissenter would have been excluded except under the considerable

disability of not being allowed to attend any other place of worship than the parish church.

One morning there was a small row in this orderly establishment. It was but a commonplace episode in schoolboy life—only the sort of row that must occur daily where two or three boys are gathered together with a master in their midst,—but it left Mr Herbert Chambers, aged fourteen and a promising pupil, in a frank rage, and was the primary cause of many future embarrassments. It was this way. Certain foolish feats of attention, called contemptuously “rep,” had been required from his form, and it chanced to Herbert to find himself in close proximity to a companion whose efforts to reproduce the required passages from the correspondence of St Paul in their original Greek were as ineffective as they were elaborate. In this miserable plight the stutterer threw a hurried glance of appeal at his neighbour. And not without result. Herbert came to the rescue. For a moment or two all went well, and it seemed that the victim of an untrustworthy memory might escape the sad deserts of failure, when, alas! the prompting sibilations fell on the ears of outraged authority.

“Did you ask to be helped?” said the master.

“No—that is, no,” said the dunce.

“Did he ask you to help him?” said the master to Herbert.

“No,” said Herbert, after the briefest pause.

Then was the offender—conscious only of a generous though foolish action—denounced to his assembled fellows as a monster of meanness. His attempts to stamp as genuine the base powers of another’s recollection were spoken of in terms that would have seemed exaggerated

in application to material coining. His necessary caution in sinning—the fact that his aid had been administered in whispers—was dubbed cowardice. And as a peroration to a lengthy tirade a charge of blasphemy was founded upon the character of the task during whose progress his sin had been committed. This last seemed to Herbert to be far-fetched, and he smiled. Luckless lad! Until that moment the accuser, though speaking with some appearance of fury, had been free from real anger; his denunciations, though loud, had been perfunctory. Luckless lad! That ill-judged smile went straight to the heart of his instructor, who saw himself held up to ridicule before those who should above all things find him serious. Herbert underwent the indignity of being soundly cuffed. And now, humiliated, with a headache, and with a bitter sense of the injustice that had been done him, he found himself compelled to go to a dancing-class—compelled to skip on a light toe while his heart was heavy within him. The incongruity of such employment threw the whole soul of him into revolt, and it was with the fervour of conviction that he expressed his feelings to little Withers, his self-constituted minion, whose orange hair and freckled face were ever at his patron's shoulder.

"Curse the brute!" said Herbert. "What does he mean by calling me a liar and a cheat? It's our business to dodge him if we can, and he's paid to catch us at it."

"Of course," said little Withers, whose knowledge of life and respect for expediency precluded him from disagreement.

"It would be different if the brute stood behind a curtain, and said, 'I trust you beggars not to prompt each other.' Then one would be a cad to swindle. As

it is, it's all fair. And he knows it's fair. He knows that. Then he calls me a liar! Curse him!"

"Of course," said little Withers.

"And I had to do it, or old Freeman would have been turned," continued the victim to schoolboy honour. "Hadn't I?"

"Of course," said little Withers.

"Of course! Of course! Oh! shut up, if you haven't anything else to say. And now there's this dancing rot! And all those beastly girls! And the other fellows will tell them about that brute hitting me—curse him!—because I was a cheat. And that'll make them laugh. Girls are all humbugging rubbish. What's the good of 'em? They never understand things. Girls!" he repeated, and his powerlessness to express adequate contempt in words took expression in a grimace.

"Of course," said little Withers, whose face became at once twisted into similar curves, as his invariable formula left his lips.

The dancing-classes which represented the arts and all the softer side of education in this old-fashioned private school were held in the little town hall, grandiloquently named "The Atheneum," and were attended by the residents of the town and the country side in addition to the members of the two schools for which West Deerhurst was celebrated. The other school was, of course, a girls' school, and, equally of course, the attitude of the two institutions towards each other was one of uncompromising hostility. The boys ridiculed the girls because they were girls—and looked for no further reason. The depreciated girls affected the greatest disdain at the approach of the boys, pretending to believe that they were all extremely rude and common persons. These

belligerents were brothers and sisters in more than one case, but blood-ties were severed in their feud as in the historic revolutions. At the dancing-classes, however, the academies were largely dependent upon one another, and, as has occurred in revolutions, were forced into unison in defence of their joint interests. For at these meetings the county-folk danced by themselves—with hauteur; and the town-folk danced by themselves—with abandon; and the schools were left to their own devices; and had they not paired off, and danced with each other—with inexperience, they would have obtained small benefit from their attendance.

Not that the fat little dancing-master noticed or respected these limitations, but then no one noticed or respected him; for West Deerhurst held concerning Frenchmen much the opinions that were prevalent at the time of the battle of Waterloo. Yet Monsieur de la Verre was worthy of both notice and respect. Of the former, because he was a curiosity of the peerage, an extraordinary mediæval survival—in short, a vidame, and probably the last specimen alive. Of the latter, because he devoted himself to his saltatory duties with perfect single-mindedness and dignified his pursuit by his enthusiasm no less than by his skill. All Monsieur de la Verre's life had been spent in giving dancing-lessons. He was perpetually bringing together, and thrusting—quite literally—into each other's arms, people who did not know each other, and did not want to; or trotting-out some exceedingly ill-born municipal miss to show the county aristocracy the right method in which a new step should be done. Or he would wildly pair a struggling hobbledehoy with a crushingly superior young lady who had completed her education at Brighton, and would

beg her in bland and fragmentary English to try to teach her partner to move lightly and with some elementary regard for time and tune. Herbert was a very poor performer and had once been subjected to this terrible ordeal. He had kicked the crushingly superior young lady on the inside of her right ankle with the energy which it was his wont to impart to all his actions, and had been roundly rated for his clumsiness in words with which no fault could be found, but in accents that could hardly have received the hall-mark of a finishing school. From henceforth dancing-lessons were his black beast, and it became his habit, immediately upon his arrival, to slink behind a heavy curtain hanging at one end of the room, and concealing from public view the rustic interior and the mountain-gorge which constituted the scenic effects of the West Deerpark Amateur Dramatic Society.

On this day it can well be believed that he was more than usually anxious to escape attention, so ill-attuned were his inclinations to skipping. But, to his disgust, when an opportunity came for him to glide into his retreat he found it already occupied by a little girl, who was seated pensively on a large packing-case attempting to play cat's-cradle by herself. He turned wrathfully to re-enter the ballroom, when a timid voice said, "Shall I go? I will, if you want to be alone."

"Well," replied Herbert, uncompromisingly, "you may as well. You see, I don't want to dance. And you don't mind it? So what's the use of your hiding?"

"But that's it," she said. "No more do I want to dance."

"What rot!" exclaimed Herbert. "Why, you always dance all the time, and old Frogs thinks the world of you." For by the insulting monosyllable of "Frogs" was Monsieur

de la Verre, the last of the vidames, known to the youth whom he instructed.

"I don't want to dance to-day," said the maiden, looking wistfully at the handsome sulky boy beside her, and dropping lightly off her perch on to the floor. "I won't dance this morning—at least, I won't with him again." And she put a rather dingy finger to a little crack where the curtains did not meet closely, and indicated the partner to whom she objected so strongly.

Herbert looked through the crack.

"Not dance with old Freeman!" he exclaimed. "Why, I thought you liked old Freeman. He said—er—that is, he told our fellows——" and the little gentleman broke off abruptly, and looked very discomposed.

"He said I liked him," completed the maiden without any perturbation; "I know he says so. But I don't. I don't like him a bit. I hate him. Yes; I do. I hate him. Is he a great friend of yours?"

"No! He's a mean brute," said Herbert, promptly; "and he played me a dirty trick this morning."

"Tell me," said she.

"Tell you! What would be the good of telling you. You wouldn't understand it."

"You don't know that."

"Tell you! Well, I *should* like to know what you would think. Girls are such——" he stopped.

"Oh! I know you despise girls."

"Old Freeman told you!"

"But it's true, even if he did. So should I if I were a boy."

"Only some girls," said Herbert, feeling that he had hitherto buried a talent for polite conversation with the other sex.

"Not me?" (with a smile).

"Not you" (with conviction).

"Then tell me what he did. Then I shall know you don't despise me."

So they seated themselves side by side on the packing-case, and rested their heads on the practicable window in the rustic interior, and he told her of his heroism and of his injuries. And he did not spare Freeman. He explained to her that Freeman had looked to him for help, and that he was therefore bound to give it. He was aware that girls didn't do such things for each other, and that they always sneaked on each other at every chance, but he would have her to understand that boys were different. He *had* to prompt when old Freeman began to go wrong—old Freeman knew that. Then just because old Freeman had not actually bawled out "What comes next?" old Freeman lied, and said that he had never asked for help, with the result that Herbert got punished and his co-offender escaped unrebuked and untouched. All Herbert's generous soul was on fire at the recollection that he had been alone in the retribution, and he wound up by announcing his deliberate intention of getting even with old Freeman quite soon. Did she think that he ought to be called a liar and a cheat?

Then there followed some pretty pettings. Her admiration for his unselfishness was as unstinted as her contempt for the duplicity of Freeman was unbounded. Her language, as that of a well-bred child should be, was restrained, but she eked it out with shruggings and mouthings that conferred upon it all the dignity of first-class commination. She was only a little girl, but she conveyed her sympathy quite unmistakably.

While Herbert was preening himself beneath this

pleasant appreciation of his virtues the tinkle of a piano beyond the veil heralded a waltz.

"Will you dance?" said she.

"I—er—er—can't," said he. "I always get ashamed when I try, and so I never try. I don't know how."

"Nonsense!" said she. "It's as easy as possible. And I am sure you would do it so well because you play cricket so well."

"Hallo! who told you that?" said he, without disclaiming the accusation. "Not Freeman, I know."

"And you can skate, can't you? Why, that's just the same. Come and try—with me. Do! we shall get into step in a minute. And I don't mind if you tread on my toes."

"I'm not such a cow as all that," said Herbert, bold in voice but a trembler at heart.

So they emerged, and waltzed.

"Why, it's as simple as anything," said he, when the music ceased.

"Yes," said she, rubbing one small ankle against the other a little ruefully.

Little Withers walked home between Herbert Chambers and old Freeman. Herbert was self-satisfied, and old Freeman was gloomy.

"I couldn't help it, you know, this morning," said the latter in apology. "It wouldn't have done you any good my saying I asked you to prompt me, so I don't see what's the use of your being so riled about it."

"Who's riled?" returned Herbert, cheerfully. "*Everyone* knows you and I might have expected it."

"What do you mean by that, Chambers?" asked Freeman, viciously.

"Never mind," replied Herbert, still cheerfully.

The three walked on in silence. Withers, on the tip-toe of expectation—for he felt a row to be imminent—and on literal tip-toe that he might bring himself into symmetrical altitude with his companions, Freeman with clouded brow, and Herbert alert, aggressive, smiling. This manner was so out of keeping with his possession of a serious grievance that Freeman was at last moved to words on the subject.

"I know what you are swaggering about. You think you've cut me out with that girl. I saw you jumping about with her—like a sick monkey. Well, you shall see."

"Oh!" said Withers, with conviction, "Chambers won't have anything to do with girls."

Herbert blushed. He was a modest boy who objected to talking of such matters, and, being sisterless, he was unused to and terribly afraid of the other sex—though he concealed his fear, as many of his elders have done, under an affectation of contempt. But Freeman was cast in a different mould. He was an unctuous lad who dressed in a style much older than his age. He wore an onyx pin in his bosom and had stories to tell of his amatory adventures during the holidays.

"You shall see," repeated Freeman jauntily.

"If you worry her I'll punch your head," said Herbert, in airy response. "Won't I, Withers?"

"Of course," said little Withers.

It was with a feeling of pleasant excitement new to his shy breast that Herbert anticipated the next dancing-lesson, and it was with real anxiety that on his arrival he looked round the room to satisfy himself of his

friend's presence. She was there and his pulses quickened. He advanced towards her but she did not glance round. He hesitated, not wishing to appear too eager, and in a moment she was lost to him. The Vidame de la Verre had exercised his capricious authority, and by pointing to the little girl's shabby shoes with his fiddle and to Freeman's glittering pumps with his bow had set the pair a-whirling. It did not tend to soothe the disappointed admirer to see that old Freeman looked very much at home in the waltz, and he retired to sit by the mountain-gorge and conceal regret for his unreadiness under defiant sentiments.

"Don't you think I am going to run about after you," he commented, as he watched her from behind the curtain moving among the moving crowd. "There! Now you're wondering where I am. Yes! Look about, you little silly! Fancy not guessing I should come in here! What now? Oh! Lancers! Well, I never shall know them, so I'll stay in here. And she doesn't know them either, for all her talk about dancing being so easy; and it looks jolly easy. What a swagger old Freeman has got on! I'll stamp on those shiny shoes of his if I get near him. Oh! No; you don't! Not again!" For a break had occurred, during which the engaging Freeman was seen sliding across the floor towards the maiden in whom Herbert was beginning to feel that he had some proprietary right. It could not be that she should twice dance with that sneak before he had claimed her! He sallied suddenly from the alcove, pushed across the room, and by a short cut reached her side simultaneously with his ingratiating rival. Herbert was prompt to act. Seeing by a rapid, circular glance that he was not observed by the vidame, he drove a sharp elbow violently into

Mr Freeman's short ribs and brought the heel of a clumsily-shod foot down upon that gentleman's patent toe, murmuring as he did so, "No; you don't." Then he turned to the amused but scandalised maiden and said, "Will you dance with me?"

"Yes," said she; "if you like."

"If I like," repeated Herbert, roughly. "What do you mean? Don't you wish to yourself? If you don't, I don't."

"You *are* nasty," said she, as she balanced herself preparatory to leading off her partner at the right place in the music.

A few minutes later found them upon the packing-case behind the curtain.

"I say," said he, suddenly; "you ain't half so lively as you were. What's up? You didn't want that fellow Freeman, did you?"

She explained. No; she did not want Freeman at all. She did not want anything. She was very happy. At least, not exactly that. Well, if he must know, she had been very badly treated at school during the morning. Shamefully used. The grossest favouritism had also been employed, whereby her partner in crime had been exonerated from all fault, while she had been severely blamed. And Miss Vincent's explanation came perilously nigh unto tears.

"There, don't go and bl—— that is, cry," said the boy. "What's the use of crying?"

"I can't help it," she pleaded.

"Oh! but you must," said he very positively, and proceeded to face her troubles for her with an alacrity and a fortitude worthy of all commendation. He pointed out that hiding behind the curtain was rather a confession

of weakness, and that to cry was babyish. He made it clear to her that she ought not to be sorry that her schoolfellow had escaped punishment, for that showed meanness — possibly common at a girls' school, but unknown among boys; and he generally indicated to her that if such a situation should ever come his way he should behave in it with a spirit of cheerful and generous philosophy.

"Oh! how brave and independent you are," she exclaimed as he stopped, glowing with the valour of his sentiments.

"So, you see, it's no use crying," he repeated, acknowledging with complacency her estimate of him, "and I hope you'll stop. Er——. Your name's Alice, isn't it?"

"Yes. Alice Maud Vaughan Vincent."

"Lord, what a mouthful!" said Herbert, irreverently. "I'm going to call you Alice. There's a book of that name—'Alice; or, The Mysteries.' My mater wouldn't let me read it in the holidays; but I saw it in a shop-window to-day, and I'm going to buy it."

And he did buy it that very morning, directing the complacent school bookseller to "Stick it up to my governor's account as a German lexicon." And he read it; and it gave him ideas.

II

When confidences had been exchanged between these young people on some four or five occasions, Herbert, assisted, doubtless, by the pages of romance, became aware that life had an object of supreme importance for

him. Of this fact he made little Withers his confidant. He was, as he bade that young gentleman observe, now fourteen years old. Many men had in their youth struck out a line for themselves, and had never regretted it. There were, of course, Don John and Raphael and the younger Pitt, as chronicled in the prize-books, and certainly they were not the only examples that could be found. For his part Herbert had decided that he would marry Alice. It was not, perhaps, exactly a career, but would do very well to begin with; and it was an action with which no one could find any fault, as it concerned himself only, and he must know best what he wanted. "Besides," he added, "it will be one in the eye for that beast Freeman." All of which was but the idle vapouring of an egotistic boy, and probably would have resulted in nothing more than the boring of his young friend, had he not at this time received his first love-letter.

It was given him at the dancing-class, and ran as follows:—

"GROVE HOUSE COLLEGE, WEST DEERHURST,
NORFOLK.

"MY DEAR HERBERT,—Margaret Boyce will give you this I have been kept in very unfairly and am not allowed to come to dancing-lessons again this term because I talk to Freeman How unfair I hate school so When will you write to me I am going to the dentist in High Street on Teusday to have a tooth stoped with the housemaid about eleven and I think she wishes to go somewhere by herself.—Beleive me, yours etc.,

"ALICE M. VAUGHAN VINCENT."

This letter gave Herbert to think, and after a little

hesitation he decided to enter upon a dashing and hazardous scheme.

"Withers," he said, "I shall run away with her. I shall go next week if the scratch-fives are over. I sha'n't go home, for they wouldn't understand. I shall go to my uncle at Shipdham. He will see after me, and then he can tell my mater that I have behaved properly. My mater thinks a lot of my uncle."

"What will her people say?" asked Withers.

"I don't know," said Herbert. "Her mater is always ill, and never says anything. She thinks her mater will love it. And her pater is always angry about everything. She says he can't be angrier about us than she has seen him when the soup is cold."

"My governor would have a fit," commented Withers, a lad with sisters.

"I can't have that girl bullied on account of a beast like Freeman, when she hates him," Herbert continued. "You know she hates him. I wish we could go at once. But I shall start on Wednesday. It's a half-holiday and I sha'n't be missed till seven."

"Won't they miss her?" asked Withers.

"I don't know," replied Herbert.

"And how are you going?"

"Walk, of course."

"Can she walk it?" asked Withers; "it's six miles."

"I don't know; she'll have to. You see, she'll have me and I shall encourage her. I shall tell her at the end of each mile that my uncle's place is only one mile farther on. I got that idea out of a book; and I shall take a flask with me, and some lemons."

"Where will you be married?" asked Withers, still practical.

"At my uncle's; he's a parson, you know."

"Of course. But about the bridesmaids and the best man and the presents and things?" said Withers, whose eldest sister had been married in the previous holidays. "All your relations ought to give you all sorts of things—tea-spoons, and photograph frames, and a hall clock; and the servants ought to subscribe for a silver salver."

"Ah, but this is a sort of elopement," said the lover.

"Of course. But you'll have to go somewhere on the Continent for a bit or to the English Lakes, won't you?"

"I think we shall take a cottage in the country," said the lover.

"Of course," said Withers. "I'll get up a subscription among the fellows for a wedding present."

Herbert had not the difficulty in securing an accomplice in his romantic project that he would have experienced if his lady-love had been a well-conducted little girl. He met her after her interview with the dentist. She was attempting to confine the chocolate that she was sucking to the sound side of her mouth, and said, as clearly as circumstances permitted, that she would come with him on Wednesday. And by way of preparation she began to learn the marriage service by heart.

Behold them, then, one hot July afternoon stepping out briskly along the dusty road in the direction of Shipdham, at whose comfortable rectory Herbert had assured her that they would meet with the warm welcome ever due to a favourite nephew.

He was much the more shy. Indeed, the maiden was not shy at all. She trotted complacently at his side, taking three steps to his two, surveying the country unconcernedly, and chattering of the curious future that lay before them.

What was his uncle like? She was glad that he was certain to be fond of her, but was she certain to be fond of him? Was he, for example, bald? She did not think that she could ever be fond of anything bald. Once she had a dove, which had been a great favourite until it moulted into bald spots, when she grew to hate it. What was his aunt like? Oh! there wasn't one. Then the housekeeper—was she nice? And why should they go to live in a cottage if there was no one at the rectory but his uncle—who was so fond of him. They would just stay with his uncle and take care of him in return for his goodness to them, and that, she was sure, would be nicer than going to live in a cottage. She had been into cottages in her mother's district and could assure Herbert that most of them were not nice at all.

This airiness was in no small measure discomposing to Herbert. In spite of the advantages that his years and sex might have been expected to lend him, he was not so firm in his design as his companion, and needed the encouragement of excitement before he could get into a proper spirit for adventurous emprise. There was no stimulus in the society of so matter-of-fact a companion as Alice was proving herself, and her calmness, so far from infecting him with a like quiet belief in success, depressed him into expectation of failure. Had the maiden faltered he would have used bold words to support her, and the use of the words would have made him feel bold. But this phlegmatic taking of things for granted, this blindness to the romantic brilliancy of the thing that he was doing in her behalf, chilled him. He became less confident of the immediate future, and the wisdom of his action seemed more doubtful. The ills that he had left behind him had been certain, and not quite intolerable.

But to what ills was he flying? Would his uncle, for instance, be pleased to see him? Or would he greet him coldly? Or, worst of all, would he refuse him hospitality and sternly order him back to his studies? Just now this seemed so probable to Herbert's shrinking soul that he wished he had not told Alice with so much precision and circumstance that his uncle would be enraptured to see them. At any rate it was folly on her part to believe him so implicitly. She ought, he felt, to know that uncles are not persons on whom their nephews can ever absolutely rely. Sometimes it's a word and a tip with them, and sometimes a word and a sniff, and no nephew, however favoured, can guess for certain which is going to be his portion.

His depression was at last noticed by his companion.

"Do you think they'll come after us, Bertie?" she asked, believing that she had guessed the cause.

"If they do we can dodge them," he replied, promptly, giving the glance of the practised bird's-nester across the meadows on either hand. "I know all the country round here—every inch of it. We'll just keep a lookout, and if we see anyone coming we can get into the woods."

"But if they catch us?"

"Then I shall tell them to let us alone and dare them to touch us. I'm not afraid of them."

"How bold you are!" said she. And she timidly took his brown and dirty hand and would have held it.

"Here! none of that," said the hero at once, getting very red in the face.

Alice remained unconfused. "I wonder what they are saying at Grove House about me," she said; "and at the Guildhall School about you?"

"Nothing as yet about me," said he. "They won't

miss me till tea-time. Old Jones will be awfully sick with me for leaving. He's our cricket captain, you see. And I don't know what they'll do for slows this season. He'll have to try and bowl them himself." Here Herbert took a four-stepped, tripping little run, ending upon his left foot which he brought down hard upon the ground as he swung his right arm in a slow, majestic circle above his head, with elbow-joint extended and wrist exaggeratedly loose. "He'll go on himself; and a pretty mess he'll make of it."

The little girl said nothing. No one wanted her, and no one would be particularly vexed at her absence. She felt also that her lover was in a better position than herself in not being already a detected refugee. For her part, she had written a note before leaving and pinned it to her pillow, stating explicitly that she had run away to get married.

"It'll put Freeman into the eleven," continued Herbert, "and he can't play more than a cat. I never thought about it (musingly) or—I—think—I—should—have—put—this—off—till—winter."

The want of confidence in the wisdom of their scheme thus indirectly expressed rapidly spread to Alice, and the next mile of their walk was taken in unrelieved moodiness.

"Will your uncle be pleased to see us?" said she at length, breaking silence with a question which had become now of considerable importance to her.

"Oh, very!" replied Herbert, with apparent conviction. "I'm his godson. He'll do anything for me. He's very fond of me."

"I hope he'll be very fond of me," said Alice.

"He'll like you for my sake," said Herbert, still with great firmness, but with deep misgivings. What

a fool he had been not to find out first if he would be welcome! What should he do—or rather where should he hide, if his uncle laughed at him in front of Alice? And his uncle might be thus unreasonably hilarious. It was impossible for Herbert to forget that this affectionate godfather had laughed consumedly at him upon occasions—upon occasions, indeed, hardly so provocative of ridicule as this. For it was a ridiculous thing that they were doing. Yes, ridiculous.

At last they came to the place where a sign-post directed them to deflect rightwards for Shipdham and to proceed straight for Norwich. Now, now must he make up his mind! And as he looks at the post he does so. To go to the right, what would it be? At the best to meet with a lukewarm reception from an uncle, and the interference of even an amiable uncle was not wholly desirable. What hero ever ran to an uncle though many have run from an uncle? And at the worst it would be ignominy. For he might be laughed at, and he might be packed off to school again. He was not afraid of his uncle. He was fairly certain of that—nay, quite certain. But this was rather an irregular way of appearing before him, and though before now Herbert had proved him a kindly soul, he was uncertain how he would act under these extraordinary circumstances. Decidedly, he would not go to his uncle. And if he should go forward? He could carve out a career for himself. He could, perhaps, live out some of the more fascinating portions of Lord Lytton's romance. He would certainly escape the punishment imminent at his uncle's for his escapade. And he would be his own master. Decidedly, he would not go to his uncle. But Norwich? A bit of a girl

could not walk all the way. And, perhaps, if they contrived to get there she would not enter into his plans. Somehow his favourite schemes did not require a girl's co-operation. What a fool he had been to bring her!! Running away was all very well, but what had induced him to ask Alice to accompany him? What a fool he had been! And as he thought of the peaceful playground, whereon had he not been engaged upon this mad freak he would have been even this afternoon earning the applause due to an accurate bowler of slows, he realised that he had undertaken a contract that he had not sufficient resolution to carry out. It had been reasonable to show old Freeman that there were other lady-killers, but it was idiotic to leave old Freeman in undisturbed possession of a place in the eleven to which he had no right. No. He must go back. As he did not find it easy to tell Alice of his new intention he temporised.

"Let's go to Norwich," he said; "it'll be much greater fun. I know the way; and we can go to the theatre."

"But I can't walk ten more miles," objected the lady. "And your uncle won't like it. If he's so fond of you he will be angry at your not coming to him."

"Let's go to Norwich," he repeated sullenly, knowing that he would rather die than meet his uncle. "Let's go to Norwich—that is, unless we go back."

"No," said Alice. "I will only go to your uncle. You said he would be pleased to see me. You said you could do anything with him, because he was so fond of you. And now——" She stopped.

"And now, what?" said her squire, rashly.

"And now you're afraid of him."

"If you say that again I'll run away and leave you here by yourself."

"You are afraid," said Alice, and sat down by the side of the road underneath the sign-post.

"Very well," said Herbert, jumping into the hedge and crushing and wriggling his way to the pasture beyond. "Good-bye," he sang out from the other side.

Alice sat quiet. Then she took off her shoes, and emptied stones out of them. Then she consulted the dial of a small silver watch but manifested no surprise at finding that it was not going. Then she began to cry a little, very quietly and decently. She was a well-brought-up girl, and tears made her feel religious, besides necessitating the use of her handkerchief. This and her prayer-book occupied the same pocket, and both, in company with a large sweet biscuit, were dragged out into her lap. First she ate the biscuit, and as she did so all immediate necessity for the handkerchief vanished. Then she examined a knot in one corner of the handkerchief, which puzzled her for a while. Then she undid it with the aid of some closely-biting, white little teeth, and as recollection dawned upon her face she swore to herself that for the future she should require no knots to remember *him* by. Then she opened the prayer-book and ripped out the marriage service and tore the sheets into atoms.

At this moment she heard wheels approaching and looking up saw a market-cart swinging and jolting towards her. Hastily thrusting her feet into her shoes she stood up and hailed the driver.

"Which way are you going, please?"

"To Norwich, missy."

"Will you take me to Hensham Rectory first?"

"It's a goodish bit of way," said the driver, pondering.

"I would give you my watch," said Alice.

"It ain't that, missy. But, you see, I don't know as I should like to take you all that way without knowing more about you."

"I'm Miss Vaughan Vincent, the daughter of the rector," said Alice, drawing herself to her whole four-feet-six. "It's marked on my handkerchief, and in this book"—holding the *articles de circonstance* towards him. "My father will be pleased with you and will give you some beer. And my mamma will put your wife into the clothing-club. And we will come and see you at Christmas, if mamma is well enough, and give you some tobacco, and your wife some tea."

"If you're Parson Vincent's daughter," said the farmer, on whom these offers of reward did not produce the marked effect that their proposer had expected, "jump up and I'll drop you at the rectory. Can you get up by yourself? Catch hold of this whip-handle. There you are!" And, in another moment, Alice was swinging and jolting towards her home.

Some ten minutes later Herbert returned, to find his lady-love gone. There was not a sign of her anywhere. Country-bred lad that he was, he looked at the road for traces of wheels, but it was a dry, hot, dusty day and the Norwich road was a well-frequented one. Other carts had come and gone during the afternoon, and there was no distinctive track left. He shouted her name and searched the hedges and ditches near the spot where he had left her. When at last he was compelled to admit to himself that further efforts would be useless he was a very miserable and contrite boy, being deeply conscious that it was his cowardice and boastfulness that had led to the fiasco.

One hope remained—perhaps she had returned to Grove House. Consoling himself as best he might with this expectation he went back to the Guildhall School where his absence had not been remarked.

Withers alone knew of it.

“Oh!” said he, “you were caught!”

“Rather not,” said Herbert, the topographer. “Why I could dodge anyone in this part of the country if I meant hiding.”

“Of course,” said little Withers. But he looked inquiringly.

“You see, she wanted to come back—I expect. Anyhow, she wouldn’t go where I wanted her to, so there was an end of it.”

“Of course.”

“You see, she had to come my way—or not at all.”

“Of course.”

“And I suppose I’d better give this back to you,” said Herbert, “as it was a sort of wedding present.” And he held out the flask.

“I’ll raffle it,” said Withers. Which he did—twenty-one tickets at a shilling each—and old Freeman drew the lucky number.

A METHOD OF ADVERTISEMENT

"You cannot get on nowadays unless fellows talk about you," said Mr Hubert Daventry. "There is no use in telling me that if I get on first the talk will follow, for it is not true. That was the old way. I've read heaps of yarns about it. Hard labour succeeded by due reward. Modest effort overnight waking up to find itself famous in the morning. London running about saying, 'Have you seen Johnson's Romeo? Superb!' or, 'Were you there when Dickson cross-examined her? Brutal!' That was the old way, I say. Nowadays, it's the talk first and the success afterwards, and the more talk the more success. Why was Johnson allowed to play Romeo at the Folies Dramatiques? Because he could act? or because when he went on the stage all the society papers fell to pointing out what an awfully nice fellow he was, and that his latest move would break his father's heart? or because he was golf champion of North Wales, and therefore the sporting papers had made his name a household word? Why did Dickson get briefs? Because he was a distinguished law-student? or because everybody talked of him as Mrs Dickson's husband? You may say that they both turned out successes—that they both justified public appreciation. Quite so! Quite so! But, and here's the point—they were talked about first and succeeded afterwards. Why, there's no rubbishing yarn I couldn't sell to the public if I was only known as a Mahatma. I should get a big practice at the bar if men would go

about swearing that I was the illegitimate son of a begum. And why am I kept at 'My lord, the carriage waits,' or, 'Dinner is served, my lady'? Is it because they know I can't act? Not at all. It's because they don't know that I can do something totally different. It's because nobody knows anything about me at all. That's all. But it can't go on much longer. I will be known."

For Hubert Daventry was seriously discouraged; so much so, that he did not strive to be just or accurate in his speech. Unappreciative publishers had sent back his novel; callous editors had rejected his articles; two years' close attendance at the courts had not brought him in enough to pay for his wig; while a recent attempt to win fame before the footlights had borne no fruits.

"I will be heard of," he continued, addressing a group of highly unsympathetic friends in the smoking-room of his club. "I will be heard of, and one day you shall all go about swaggering that you knew me to speak to, and your female cousins when they hear it from you will say, 'Really, how awfully nice!' And it won't be very long before I manage it somehow." Whereat all his friends laughed consumedly. For Hubert Daventry was considered a very ordinary person.

One day he made a little excursion up the river with a lady, and achieved almost immediately his heart's desire. For he became heard of, and very distinctly. Within a few hours not to know him was to argue one's self a dullard. Within a few hours his house-mates at school and his tutors at college had been interviewed. Within a few hours his photographs were on sale in shop windows and no less than nine females communicated to him a desire to marry him, contingent upon his ability to marry

them. Not one of them doubted his willingness, though each admitted that her proposal was a little forward.

And this is how it came about. Hubert and his companion Miss Vera Vernon, a young lady who had recently commenced an artistic career at the same theatre as the one where he was engaged, secured a railway carriage to themselves. Miss Vernon was not a reposeful person, and could not make up her mind whether she would sit facing the engine or looking away from it. She tried one corner, and then another, and finally propped herself up against the handle of the door and appealed to Hubert to settle the difficult question for her. Hubert suggested that she should sit with her back towards the engine. To this she asked, How could she when it always made her sick, as he knew very well? He suggested, that being the case, that she should face the direction in which they were travelling, but was immediately posed by the retort that, To do so always gave her a bad cold in the head. With unimpaired good temper he recommended her to sit on the floor.

"If you can't think of anything wiser than that," said she pouting, as she looked at her smart frilled skirt, "I think I'll call the guard"; and she leant out of the window backwards and made a feint of reaching for the cord that on most lines pretends to be a means of communication between that functionary and the passengers. As she did so the door of the railway carriage on which she was half-leaning and half-sitting flew open. Hubert Daventry leaped forward. He could not quite reach her skirts as she sank backwards out of the carriage, but she clutched wildly and desperately in the direction of his outstretched arm, by good fortune secured it, and was saved.

"That was a shave, young woman," said he, as he settled her on a seat regardless of its aspect in relation to the engine, and adjusted his wristband which had been almost torn off his shirt, while he looked ruefully at a badly scratched hand.

"I was nearly killed," said she, laughing a little hysterically. "If I had fallen out," she added, "it might have been very awkward for you, for people would certainly have said that you threw me out of the carriage."

"It would have looked like it," said he.

"Just like it," said she, laughing now that her terror was past. "I saw a man at the window of the next carriage looking out at me when I was reaching up for the cord; I know he thought something wrong was going on."

And sure enough at the next station a man came and peered curiously in upon them.

"That's him," said the girl; "he's worrying about me. I'll give him something to worry about," she added. And when he passed the window again, which he did under the stimulus of evident anxiety, this excellent young mimic threw a stage glance of horror at him and half-raised her clasped hands and wrung them for his benefit convulsively, after the manner of certain recent lessons she had received upon the boards.

She looked at Hubert to ask him to appreciate her humour, but he was apparently buried in thought. "What's up?" she asked. "What's the latest plan?" But he did not answer; his eyes were shining and his lips were moving. A stranger might have uncharitably concluded that he was a little insane. But his companion knew him, and knew that he was only meditating deeply, and that the result would be speedily

forthcoming in some wild, silly language. For to tell the truth he often bored her, as he did his club friends, with little disquisitions on the bitterness of being unknown and his determination to alter such a state of things immediately.

“We’ll do it,” he said, suddenly breaking silence. “It will be splendid.” And then and there he unfolded the project which his brain had rapidly formed on the hint contained in his companion’s words. “We will go to the Horn, have some lunch, and start for a row. I will land you near X—— station, and you shall run up to town by the first train you can catch. Leave your hat on the bank. I will return to the inn alone and pay for the boat, and come up by the next train. The passer-by who finds your hat will conclude that you are drowned. We will dine together at K——’s, where I will meet you, and we will read the paragraphs in the evening papers about ‘the mysterious disappearance of a young lady,’ ‘supposed drowning fatality,’ and so on. Then, when those editors have quite done making public asses of themselves, I shall confess that the hat was left there to see what would happen, and point out how wildly the ordinary newspaper people jump at conclusions for the sake of sensation. I shall explain that all we did was really a plant upon them. Then all those papers will have to talk about me and you. I shall send my photograph to the illustrated ones. I should think some manager might see that I am the man for a real good drama. I am sure they would give me better parts if I brought off a little score of that sort and got it mentioned in the press. Why, it’s just the sort of joke Sothern was always concocting, and he played any part he liked. Let’s try it! What do you say?”

The lady thought it would not be a bad joke, supposing it was necessary to make a joke at all, but rather demurred at leaving her hat on the bank.

"I dare say you think this is an ordinary sort of hat," she said, raising her hand reverentially and touching a mass of roses, corn-cockles, feathers, and paste buckles, "but I gave—well, a month's salary for it."

"I'll get you another one," said Hubert. "If you don't leave something pretty visible on the bank the casual passer-by will not detect the presence of the crime. Everyone knows that a hat on the bank is the recognised sign of a body in the water, and I don't think even a village policeman could overlook that hat if it was dropped anywhere on his beat. You can wear my cap up to town, and we'll buy another hat to-morrow."

It fell out that, in the street of the village where it was proposed to have luncheon and to hire their boat, Mr Hubert Daventry saw a lady of his acquaintance coming towards them. Now, his friends had not altered in their demeanour because he had deserted the bar, where he was not wanted, for the stage, where he did not appear to be in any greater demand. They were too modern for such views, as well as too liberal-minded. But the sight of this lady, in her workmanlike flannel surmounted by a plain sailor hat, made him suddenly conscious of Miss Vera Vernon's extreme splendour of attire, and he knew instinctively that a meeting would be awkward. The two girls did not belong to the same world; they looked at things from a totally different point of view, and to introduce them to each other would give pleasure to neither. He turned up an alley rather abruptly.

As he might have expected, this move did not escape

his companion's notice, who began cross-examining him on the subject during luncheon. Hubert, intent upon his scheme, was not inclined to waste time in idle words, and said so with an abruptness that proved exasperating.

"You coward! You are ashamed to be seen with me!" said Miss Vera Vernon, loudly.

Hubert replied in his turn a little angrily—for no one likes to be called a coward—"Perhaps you think I ought to introduce you about the place as the girl I am going to marry?"

Then the waiter was seen standing inside the door seeking an opportunity to announce to the visitors that their boat was ready. So they laughed, and were friends again.

They were a little nervous as they went down to the water. Indeed, it is hard not to be nervous when on the edge of perpetrating a foolish joke. It is only the most practised and callous performer who can venture boldly where failure must entail ridicule, and neither of these young people had the nerves or the experience of Sothern.

Hubert sculled in silence up stream until he reached a spot admirably suited to their purpose. This was a small reach about four hundred yards long, and hidden from the gaze of anyone who chanced to be above or below by the abrupt winding of the stream.

Here he turned into the bank and helped his accomplice out.

"Leave your hat," he said, "and run up stream about a quarter of a mile and you will see the Great Western station quite near the bank. Here's my cap. K——'s at 8.30. I'll get the table in the first window. Shove her out with your foot. Got any money? All right!"

He turned, and began sculling back. She, in obedience

to his instructions, began running along the tow-path in the opposite direction. As she did so she turned every now and again to watch him, for he was a good-looking man, and the sculling action suited him. Seeing which he took one of his hands off his sculls every now and then and waved a little encouragement to her in the prosecution of their splendid joke. And he came to the down corner and she came to the up corner, and he began to disappear from her gaze, and she hung over the brink to watch him, and alas, she slipped. Vainly she clutched at all within her grasp; the frail twigs snapped, the rotten bank yielded, she slid further and fell in.

Two hours later the body was found by a passer-by who noticed the hat lying on the bank just below the fatal spot. Mr Hubert Daventry's cap was clutched convulsively in the girl's grasp. In the crown of it was written his name.

In the meantime the gentleman had further elaborated his joke. Why should there only be one person drowned? Why not two or more? And was a hat enough evidence of an accident? Was it not possible that some felonious female should come along and, recking little of the inner meaning of the head-gear on the towing-path, should annex it, and carefully abstain from giving to her discovery the desirable publicity? Decidedly a hat was not enough. But about the meaning of a boat with its keel turned skyward there could be no hesitation.

To think was to act. Your practical joker is, above all things, careless of the personal property of other people. Hubert headed for the opposite bank to that on which he had landed Miss Vera Vernon, sprang out, turned the boat bottom uppermost and sent it spinning with a

kick down stream. Then he walked rapidly to the nearest railway station on the South Western track. As he drew near a train going in the direction of London came into sight, steaming slowly along the valley. He decided to try to catch this by running straight across the two fields that lay between him and the station instead of going round by the highway. He was successful, and threw himself panting into the last carriage as it glided away from the platform. At Clapham Junction an official asked austere for his ticket. Hubert confessed to not having purchased one before entering the train, and thought it a good occasion to rally the collector on the dryness of the official demeanour. The collector was hot, tired, and busy, and eyed Hubert sourly. If he could have formulated a charge against him he would have done so, and Hubert, perceiving this, continued to think that it was droll to chaff the man.

By 8.30 Hubert was seated in the first window next to the entrance at K——'s, having left word at his chambers that if Miss Vera Vernon called for him she was to be told that he was already gone to the restaurant. By nine o'clock she had not arrived, and Hubert ordered dinner, and asked the waiter to bring him a paper.

"No news, Fritz?" he said, as he opened the sheet. Fritz thought there was no news. "Nobody dead? No fires? No tragedies? No young women found drowned? No—Hullo!" A shadow fell across the paper and he looked up to find a man standing over him. "Hullo? Mr Hubert Daventry you believe? Yes; I am Mr Hubert Daventry, but you have the advantage of me."

Hubert was arrested for murder and fully committed on

the charge. Before the judge the following points were clearly made out by the prosecution:—

(1) On the afternoon of the murder he had been recognised by a lady walking with the unfortunate girl, and had tried to escape notice by concealing himself.

(2) He had quarrelled with the deceased at the Horn Inn before starting on the fatal expedition, and had said that he would not marry her. He looked very pale on starting. These facts were contributed by the waiter at the Horn.

(3) Later he was seen by a man working in the fields to turn his boat over and kick it down stream, and then to start running into the country.

(4) The guard of the train swore to his having no ticket on arrival in London that evening, and no hat, and to his being very odd in his manner—so odd that the guard remembered him well, and would swear to him anywhere.

(5) When arrested his hand was severely scratched, while examination of the shirt that he had worn showed that one cuff was nearly torn off.

(6) There were signs of a scuffle on the bank, and the victim had the prisoner's cap in her hand.

(7) A man came forward to tell a most suggestive incident, which he had witnessed when travelling out from London by the same train as Hubert and Miss Vera Vernon. He chanced to be in the next carriage, and saw Miss Vernon lean out of window and reach for the rope communicating with the guard. The next moment it seemed to him that the door came open, and that an attempt was made to push the unfortunate girl on the line. He noticed the pair again at the next station, when he thought that the girl gave him an appealing glance. Before he could act on it, however,

the train started, and he tried to comfort himself by believing that he had not witnessed an abortive attempt at outrage. When he read of the recovery of the corpse and the arrest of the supposed murderer, he communicated with the coroner, and identified the body as that of the girl in question, and the prisoner as her companion.

(8) The detective who effected Hubert's arrest swore that before he could caution him to be silent he heard him ask the waiter if any bodies of drowned girls had been found. This was before the discovery had been published in the press.

The theory of the prosecution was that the prisoner had been strolling along the bank with the unfortunate girl—the mark where the boat had been put in had been found—that he had quarrelled with her, and pushed her into the river. That he had then rowed a little way from the spot and turned the boat over, hoping to make his act appear the result of an accident.

For the defence the true story was told.

He was found guilty.

In reply to the awful question of the judge whether he had anything to say why the utmost penalty should not be inflicted, he said, "My lord, it was all a joke."

Many have sung, and many have narrated the charms of mediocrity, but no one appreciates it highly for himself. Few consider themselves commonplace people. Yet occasionally it will be borne in upon a man that he is but an average specimen. Sometimes he will sit down under his fate and will court only the average destiny; holding all public achievements as very wondrous, for in this way his inability to perform them may be best excused. Sometimes he will turn hither and thither

vaguely, hurriedly, inconsequently, if haply he may cheat his own mediocrity or encompass fame by some rapid bye-path.

Hubert Daventry was mediocre and his soul loathed mediocrity. He did not die for nothing.

Notoriety he obtained in the way we have indicated, and even some measure of literary success became his, for the *Evening Scorpion* had in their office a manuscript signed with the assassin's name. The editor promptly published the story, with a portrait of Hubert and a facsimile of his signature attached; and he sold two editions of the paper on the day of issue.

ERIC AND ROBERT

ERIC and Robert were schoolfellows, and in their boyhood behaved like friends. They chanced to be neighbours at home, and this was responsible for infusing into their relations an appearance of intimacy, inasmuch as they would address each other by their Christian names, and would occasionally lapse into local allusions; but to me, who knew them both, it always seemed that they kept up considerable semblance of friendship, and some of its practice, because each distrusted the other. I may have wronged them, and possibly they were as fond of each other as school friends usually are, but this, at least, was notorious—they were desperately jealous of each other. And circumstances gave them cause, for circumstances of all sorts constantly pitted them against each other. Robert was the son of an officer in Her Majesty's army, and adopted a condescending tone towards Eric, the son of a solicitor. Eric, the son of a thriving business man, would in return show an obtrusive sympathy for Robert, the son of an impecunious half-pay major. When Eric got a scholarship for which Robert had competed, Robert congratulated him very heartily, because "now your governor will probably send you to college," implying that only as long as culture paid would Eric be permitted to go in for culture. Eric showed his appreciation of Robert's congratulations by debating with all of us separately—and begging, of course, that the matter should go no further—whether he ought to resign the prize, as the money meant

so little to him and might mean so much to Robert. When Robert was selected to represent the school at cricket, in the place that Eric had confidently expected for himself, Eric's interest in the national game waned, and he took to lawn-tennis.

Both entered the same university, where, availing themselves of the liberties of college life, they took different courses and saw little of each other. And this was the easier that they had few common friends. If a man knew Eric he somehow did not care to meet Robert. If, on the other hand, a man was on confidential terms with Robert, he would get an impression that Eric was rather a person to be avoided. But although the breach between them was now patent to everyone, they kept up the fiction of being friends, and remained "Eric" and "Robert" to each other. The university worked changes upon them. Eric, who had been studious, grew idle, read promiscuously, and adopted a didactic and critical tone. He disappointed his early promise by taking a very poor degree, which was hardly redeemed by the facts that he came near to obtaining a medal for an English essay, and obtained a publisher (if not a public) for a sheaf of verses in which he confessed to feeling the shame consequent upon certain sins which, to his credit be it said, he had never committed. Robert, on the contrary, grew diligent, and became bitten with Orientalism. The result of this was to make him the only examinee in divers unpronounceable dialects, while it took seven professors to examine him. With a not unnatural generosity they awarded him a first-class in the trips.

It was about this period that their affair with Edith took place. She was a country neighbour, and they both fell in love with her. Probably she would have married

Robert, who was first in the field, if Eric had not interfered. Probably she would have married Eric later, if Robert had shown a proper dignity and taken his refusal as final. But he continued, as Eric said, to pester the girl, and she, being a peaceful lass, married the local brewer as a short way out of the dilemma.

With a university career and a love affair thus brought to their definite conclusions, each young man felt that the real business of life was now before him. Robert returned to the university, took pupils in the Cashmere dialects, and began to make a reputation for himself as a numismatist. His studies had infused a new enthusiasm into his schoolboy trick of coin-collecting, and had thrown over it a glamour of classic learning. His work as a coach allowed him plenty of leisure to pursue his hobby, and in a short time the collection and classification of medals and money-tokens became the serious business of his life. At two or three public sales he gave the highest prices on record. Next came rumours of his fortunate bargains and acute discoveries. It was he who took a cottage in the country for a fortnight and found a vase full of Roman coins, including specimens of remarkable variety, beneath the strawberry bed. In reference to this episode, Eric was heard to express a hope that the lord of the manor had received his due. It was Robert, again, who bought a unique silver didrachm for fourpence, out of the window of a shop within ten paces of the British Museum, a window against the blurred panes of which every virtuoso in Europe had flattened his nose. From the newspaper notoriety which he thus acquired to public recognition as an expert in his subject, and even in Greek and Roman art generally, was but a short step. He was chosen with acclaim the librarian and curator of the Institute of a

northern town, became a serious candidate for election to the Royal Society, and sat down to write an exhaustive book on his subject.

Meanwhile Eric also had become prosperous. Shortly after leaving college he entered a small publishing firm, and became quickly the presiding genius of the business. He had smattered much, and was able to take an interest in many phases of life; he was a shrewd man of business, having an eye to practical chances for all his semblance of idleness; he was a very respectable linguist; he had, and took care to have, an immense personal acquaintance. All these things assisted him, and in a short time he found himself recognised as a factor in literary London. Nowadays, Eric's methods have nothing unusual about them, but ten years ago he was very modern, almost a pioneer in his designs to build up a business. His offices were in the west end of the town, and his clients, mostly the sort of Bohemians who rough it in Lancaster Gate or Lennox Gardens, were encouraged to lounge about them, what time they abused each other over cigarettes. He made a speciality of young people's verses, and brought out a weekly circular in which he described the young people for the benefit of the public in terms of indiscretion. He republished Elizabethan poetry in numbered copies on hand-made paper with curious illustrations. He ran a serious magazine entitled *The Mirror of Contemporary Thought*, to which he obtained contributions from an archbishop, a prize-fighter, and a premier. Of course he had a Series. It was called the Record Reign Series, and consisted of little manuals stuffed with home-truths about the Great People of the Victorian Era. It was Eric's habit among his intimates to allude slightly to this Series as vulgar

by comparison with his other efforts, but to himself he would own that he had no fault to find with it, for it had a vogue among the little people of the era, a body who are able to give very useful support to what they like.

Soon after the establishment of *The Mirror of Contemporary Thought* there were hints in various periodicals that the coming book of research which all would have to read—a book from which amusement and artistic pleasure would be derived as surely as mere information—was Robert's Manual of Numismatics. Eric, who was his own editor, lent the pages of his review to Mr Mortimer Batson, the encyclopædic critic, that he might make a forecast of the work. Mr Batson's article essayed, firstly, to dispose of numismatics as a science for ever; and, secondly, to indicate that Robert's numismatics presented a foolish fad in a more contemptible light than it had previously appeared. Mr Batson was thorough, and deserved credit for his imagination, inasmuch as he had only three little stray papers from Robert's pen and a few annotated catalogues to guide him to his conclusions, while those who read his article could scarcely fail to see that Robert was a vicious, ignorant, and pretentious man. Eric, with an independence of spirit worthy of all commendation in a log-rolling age, gave publicity to these strictures upon his old schoolfellow, though, as he said everywhere, he was deeply sorry that Robert should have been exposed.

It was about this time that Eric came up for election at Robert's club. Robert was so busy in the matter that more might have been expected from his efforts on behalf of his friend than actually came of them. Eric was rejected, as there seemed to be a wide impression

that he was not a clubable person. Robert, as he said everywhere, was deeply sorry that Eric should not have been more fortunate.

To his inner self each now owned that he loathed the other, but the position between them was not made publicly clear. Robert's appointment in the north kept him far from London, while Eric's devotion to business made his permanent presence in the metropolis necessary; since, therefore, they never met, a formal agreement not to meet was superfluous. But, oddly to say, at the very time when all things pointed most directly to a complete if not a declared breach of friendly relations, Eric's business instincts brought them together. He was always ready for a bargain despite an affectation of amateurishness in the conduct of his affairs, and he wrote to Robert to ask if he could have the honour and pleasure of publishing the forthcoming book on numismatics. He would like so much to publish it, he said; firstly, because he felt sure that it would be a good book—one, not to make too great a pretence to disinterestedness, that would bring in money; and secondly, because he wished to dissociate himself for ever from Mr Mortimer Batson's vile attack on Robert. Why should not Robert run up to town, dine, and talk the matter over?

Robert was pleased at the unexpected invitation, seeing in it a remarkable tribute to the worth of his book. So he came to London in response, and the two old school-fellows dined and talked, and parted entirely dissatisfied with each other. For Robert was exasperating. He spoke of his forthcoming book as the only work that had ever been done on the subject that was worthy of serious consideration. He boasted that it would open to him

the portals of the Royal Society, and would cause him to be quoted as a pioneer in numismatic circles for ever.

"It has taken me ten years to write, sir, and two more to illustrate," said he, banging the table, "but it will pay me with ten lifetimes of fame. The book is unique." All this was irritating to Eric, as Eric's unresponsiveness was displeasing to Robert. Eric had wished to publish the book that he might place Robert under an obligation, and at the same time reap some reward in money and in reputation for enterprise. He found that he was regarded as receiving a favour, not as conferring one, while the more he heard of the book the less did it seem certain that there was any money to be made by traffic in its issue. He listened to the gasconades of his guest without interrupting, and as he listened his hate burned within him. They parted without any definite arrangement being made.

On the following day Robert took his manuscript to several publishers, all of whom, to his unqualified disgust, refused to entertain the idea of publishing it at their own risk. It would cost a thousand pounds at least to produce, he was informed, while it would appeal to only a small public; wherefore with a common wisdom they one and all preferred to have the initial expenses, or a great proportion of them, guaranteed. Robert was a downcast author when he returned to his hotel, where, to his surprise, he found awaiting him a generous offer from Eric. It was more than a generous offer; by comparison with those that had been made by the other publishers, it was prodigal. The brief conditions were that Robert was to deliver the complete manuscript and illustrations by a certain date, and that he was to assign absolutely and for ever all his rights in the book to Eric, in return

for a thousand pounds. In the face of the morning's adventures Robert could only close at once with Eric.

On the morning of the day upon which the manuscript was to be delivered Robert received a letter from Eric, laudably anxious to keep his share of the contract, reminding him that the work was due, and hoping that he would bring or send the original illustrations, and leave their reproduction entirely to his publisher's instructed discretion.

"Fidgety fool!" thought Robert, who had already tied up the illustrations with the manuscript, and into whose mind no idea of interfering in the details of publication had ever entered. "Fidgety fool!" he repeated.

Suddenly a thought occurred to him that made him shiver, and he drew from his pocket-book a document which he consulted closely, as though he would wring from the words another than their obvious meaning. It was the letter which contained Eric's offer of publication, a letter which Robert, with forethought, had taken to Somerset House for official stamping, and which constituted the agreement between the author and the publisher. Then he telegraphed to Eric a few words of regret that the work was not yet quite ready for the printer. The next days he spent, assisted by his pupils, in making rough imitations and tracings of many of the original illustrations in his work, while he sent the text to be type-written. Then he returned to London, with a parcel in each hand, one containing the original illustrations and the type-written text, the other the rough imitations of certain of the pictures and the original manuscript. The first parcel he left with a well-known publisher, asking for an appointment later on in the day, and the second he took with him to Eric.

Eric was white, and received him almost affectionately.

"I am quite ready for you," said he. "Here is the agreement for your signature assigning to me all your rights in your work on consideration of my giving you a thousand pounds; and here is a cheque for that sum."

Robert looked at the cheque and put it in his pocket.

"When shall you bring the book out?" he asked.

Eric had in the meantime untied the parcel, and was running his eye hastily over the manuscript. He seemed satisfied with the perusal.

"I will tell you in a moment," he answered, and he walked into a little room behind the office, carrying the manuscript with him.

"This is a joke," said Robert to himself as Eric closed the door, and staid man of science though he was, he made a shuffling step or two on the carpet which were intended to be capers. And then there came a sound of fire-irons from Eric's retreat, whereat Robert capered again, and more wildly.

Barely was he steady on his legs from a big spring when Eric re-entered the room and seated himself at his desk. His face was now whiter than before.

"As I have bought your book right out," he said, "of course I can do what I like with it."

"Well?" said Robert.

"Well," said Eric, "I have paid you, and I have burnt your book."

"You've burnt the work of my life?" said Robert. Then he added, after a moment's silence, "Aren't you afraid that I shall kill you?"

"No," said Eric, dropping his hand in an open drawer

before him, whence a click immediately proceeded ; "no ; I thought of that."

"I suppose you really have burnt my manuscript?" said Robert.

"I have," said Eric.

"And all the pictures and charts?"

"All of them, I hope."

"Many of which I told you I could not replace."

"I remember that you said so."

"Are you sorry?" said Robert.

"Not in the least," said Eric.

"Are you ashamed?"

"I am not ashamed."

"Then there's nothing more to be said?"

"Nothing."

So Robert went out and cashed the cheque. He then went to the publishers with whom he had left the other copy of his work.

"Print it regardless of expense," he said. "I am prepared to spend a thousand pounds, if necessary, on its production and advertisement."

A few weeks later the book appeared, and in a short preface Robert bore eloquent testimony to the generosity of Eric, who had crowned a life-long affection by an act of splendid munificence in making a noble contribution to the cost of his old friend's work. So ran Robert's eulogy.

Eric wrote a letter to the publishers, threatening to restrain them from publishing the work, but Robert took all responsibility on his own shoulders, and at once increased his advertisements in every direction. Then he wrote to Eric advising him for the sake of his own reputation to keep quiet.

"I have used your thousand pounds," the letter ran, "to complete our agreement, for it was the essence of our agreement that the book should be published. This was not said ; it was understood. If you annoy me I may be tempted to allow that you have burnt the real book and the genuine illustrations ; in which case I shall bring an action against you for breach of contract, and the damage will be laid at ten times the sum I have received from you. Be wise, my dear old school friend, and join with me in forgetting a melancholy episode, which has after all had a joyous termination—for my book is selling thoroughly well. If the truth were made public, all decent people would look askance at you ; while acute men of business, who might have forgiven you a successful piece of malice, would never overlook the fact that you were fooled. My open-handed patron, dry up !"

THE VALUE OF THE POSTSCRIPT

- (1.) From *Henry Graham Watson, Esq., Ovington House, Norfolk*, to *Ronald Malcomson, Esq., Elm Court, Temple*.

Dec. 10th, 1896.

DEAR MALCOMSON,—My wife and I hope that you will come to us for Christmas. This is a dullish sort of place ; but I believe that I can promise you an attraction. I can also promise you a hearty Christmas welcome ; but you are said by the reviewers to have caught the nineteenth-century lassitude, and if I understand what that means, anything in the way of heartiness would bore you. The attraction I allude to is simply a young woman, and my wife's friend. We were so pleased that "An Episode in Mark's Career" proved a triumph for you. Of course, I recognised you on every page. It's just the way you would come and drivel in my rooms till all hours of the morning.

Hoping to see you soon, and with kindest regards from
Lucy—Ever yours,

HENRY G. WATSON.

- (2.) From *Ronald Malcomson, Esq., Elm Court, Temple*, to *Henry G. Watson, Esq., Ovington House, Norfolk*.

Dec. 13th, 1896.

MY DEAR WATSON,—Thanks very much. I should like to come ; and think it is very kind of you and your wife to give me another chance. I have often felt guilty

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at not having made it possible to turn up at Ovington before.

My book, of which you have spoken so kindly, has not been exactly a popular success, but it has done me good. I have got off my mind and on to paper a good deal of vapouring, and that I look upon as salutary, on the principle that a rash is better out. And as you seem to have recognised that some of my rash has been inside since we were at college you must allow that it was high time for its outward show. With kind regards to your wife—I am, yours very sincerely,

RONALD MALCOMSON.

(3.) From *Mrs Watson, Ovington House, Norfolk*, to *Miss Mildred Trefusis Vanneck, Queen's Gate Gardens*.

Dec. 20th, 1896.

DEAREST MILLIE,—I am so glad you can come, and the sooner the better; and I have a little surprise for you. Henry has asked the man who wrote that book you thought such a lot of to spend Xmas here, and he's coming; so you'll meet him. It was a silly, conceited sort of book, I thought, and had not got any story in it. Will you bring some of those lace scarves with you that everyone is wearing, or going to wear, which is better still? I want two. A fine one to go with a new amber tea-gown (such a beauty), and a very coarse one to go with my brocade. I am looking forward to seeing you, and mind you bring the book with you—I never can remember its title, there's such a lot of it—for I think we ought to read it up and quote from it. There are verses in it, for I think it wouldn't do to quote prose. At least, people never do, and, of course, it's much harder

to learn by heart, and one doesn't want to be peculiar. Henry says that Mr Malcomson is a quiet man, but dangerous to meddle with, so you must not be mischievous. Don't forget the lace things, and remember me to all your people.—Yours affectionately,

LUCY WATSON.

P.S.—Don't forget the lace things.

(4.) From *Ronald Malcomson, Esq., Ovington House, Norfolk*, to *Oliver Le Mesurier, Esq., The S— Club, Piccadilly*.

Jan. 6th, 1897.

DEAR OLIVER,—So sorry you have been bothered by my absence, but you must go on doing the art scraps for me. I came down here about a fortnight ago, and I didn't mean to have stopped so long.

Watson is just the same as ever. By-the-by, he is *not* quite the same as ever, for Cambridge has grown on him, and he is now a super-undergraduate, or should I call him a sub-undergraduate? We talk Cambridge in the evenings, when the women are gone to bed. We hint at Cambridge all day, but then we talk it solid. I array myself in one of his blazers—he has scores—and he sits opposite to me in a similar get-up, and we jaw—there's no other word for it. At least he does. Dear old chap! He means every evening to give himself an intellectual treat, and he tries to pump me about Maeterlinck, and so on. Of course that puts me in a hole; for as I read Maeterlinck, I cannot speak with abrupt authority about him. So I seize on the first decent opportunity and lug in Trinity. After that I have nothing more to do but listen, and nod.

Of course I have not been staying here for Watson's

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sake. I have stayed for the sake of a study—an absurdly interesting girl. Imagine a quiet girl who wants to be noisy, but knows that it would not suit her style. Imagine also a clever girl, who has really good understanding and good taste, but who cultivates the arts of being foolish and inconsequent. She is admirably dressed, and sufficiently distinguished to look better in fine clothes than in a lot of beastly tweeds and a man's hat. Watson's wife is rather a foil to her in this last respect, for she's always on view in red and brown checks until the time comes for her to don a sort of yellow dressing-gown with an embroidered bib round its neck. I have heard her refer to this with unmeasured respect as her "amber tea-gown," but I assure you it's nothing but a dressing-gown.

I shall be up in town in a few days now. As the novel seems rather to have caught on, I think I shall stop doing the little things and have a serious try to write a better big thing.—Ever yours, RONALD MALCOMSON.

(5.) From *Miss Mildred Trefusis Vanneck, Ovington House, Norfolk*, to *The Honourable Ethel Pendre-Mold, Eaton Square*.

Jan. 8th, 1897.

MY DEAREST LITTLE ETHELINDA,—I'm coming back to-morrow, and shall be in heaps of time to go with you to the Robertsons' theatricals. It's very good of your mother to take the responsibility of me again, for I think I scared her a good deal last time. I hope you made Lady Mold quite understand that I had met Captain Foster before.

I have had such a funny Christmas at Lucy Dewing's—

that is, Lucy Watson's. We always said she'd be married first, and her husband's quite fond of her. The author of "An Episode in Mark's Career" has been here and I like him immensely, but he has been very determined that he won't like me. He's been observing me instead of admiring me—at least, that is how he began. I am not so sure where we are now. He was awfully afraid of me at first, but he has got over that lately. I think he was really shy and unused to people like me, but he was clever enough to hide it by pretending to be quiet and exclusive. I like him, as I say, immensely, but I think he is the sort of man who ought to have a lesson. His book is full of rules for dealing with women and managing us, and he is trying to reckon me up and make me fit into these rules. I see a great deal of him, and he is always very careful about what he says. I do not mean that he is afraid of going too far, because we haven't been love-making at all. But he watches the effect of his words to see what I shall do or say next. He thinks he can guess, you know. Of course I am not going to let anybody treat me like that, yet I don't know how to resent it and make him sorry, as, to do him justice, he shows no signs of being foolish about me. But the Watsons are quite foolish about *him*. Lucy, who hasn't read his book, always talks as if he were the leading novelist of the day. But you remember Lucy's little ways at school, and she's just the same. I can see him jump when she does it, he hates it so. But his writing is the soft side of him, and I have let him know that I appreciate it. And he doesn't jump with me. He just purrs; and then I lay it on thick, and he purrs again. I make him feel he is what your brother Bob would call a genius at seven-stone-two.

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Lucy sends her kind regards. You might ask her to call when she's in town. I know she would like it, and she's never in town. She's an awful liar—there's no other word for it.

Good-bye, my dear, till I see you. Be a very good little girl. It's such a funny sensation to feel yourself stuck through with a pin and examined, and to know that the clever person who is classifying you is doing it all wrong. And it's not the sort of attention that suits your own

MILLIE.

(6.) From *Ronald Malcomson, Esq., Elm Court, Temple,*
to *Henry Watson, Esq., Ovington House, Norfolk.*

Feb. 7th, 1897.

MY DEAR WATSON,—Just a line in reply to your letter, which ought to have been answered before. No; I don't think a tale made up of our old college adventures and good times would be a popular success, and I am sure I am not the sort of person to write such a story, although you are exactly the sort of person with whom to collaborate on the subject.

Please give my kind regards to Mrs Watson, and thank her again for me for a very jolly Christmas. I thought Miss Vanneck all you say and more also. In fact, the very girl for a rich man's wife. I'm poor.—Yours very truly,

RONALD MALCOMSON.

(7.) From *Mrs Watson, Ovington House, Norfolk,* to *Miss Mildred Trefusis Vanneck, Queen's Gate Gardens.*

Feb. 9th, 1897.

DEAREST MILLIE,—So you've been mischievous after all. Henry has had *such* a letter from Mr Malcomson

about you. I wish I could send it on to you. He thinks you would make *such* a splendid wife, and only wishes he was rich enough to ask you. He says he never spent *such* a delightful Christmas, and I'm sure that must be nearly all your doing, for he never talked to anybody else that I could see, except a lot of deep stuff about books and things to Henry in the evenings, and that sort of thing, you know. Henry told me that he quite enjoyed the conversations about art and literature; and, of course, Mr Malcomson is awfully clever. And Henry says he isn't so poor as he makes out. Besides, the books must bring him *heaps*. He wants to try and write a book about Cambridge with him, but he doesn't think he would be able to do it, though he would have helped him in some of it. But I mustn't bother you about him, as I dare say you never gave him a moment's thought; and you won't tell him or anybody, will you, about my having told you, because it was in a letter to Henry? Of course, it wasn't marked private, so there can be no harm in repeating what he said, can there, as you're such an old friend? —Yours affectionately,

LUCY WATSON.

P.S.—You lucky girl, to be in London.

(8.) From *Miss Mildred Trefusis Vanneck, Queen's Gate Gardens*, to *Mrs Watson, Ovington House, Norfolk*.

Feb. 10th, 1897.

DEAR LUCY,—How sweet of you to tell me what Mr Malcomson said, for I don't believe he would ever have told me himself. His impassioned assertion that he would marry me if only he had enough money deserves some

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recognition, and the season of the year suggests the form it should take. It's a horribly out-of-date idea, I know, but I suppose one can still buy such things as valentines. I should like to get the old-fashioned sort one reads of. It should have a border of lace, and hearts, and arrows, and little boys dressed for their morning tub, and inside there should be a picture of a gentleman and lady in eighteenth-century riding costume, walking arm-in-arm up a twisted path to a spikey church. Ethel Pendre-Mold first put the idea of a valentine into my head, and we asked Mills, Lady Mold's maid, to see if she could get anything of the sort when she was out, and Mills said that "she knew her ladyship would be very offended that she should be asked to do such a thing." Mills is a dreadfully new woman.—Yours ever,

M. T. V.

(9.) From *Mrs Watson, Ovington House, Norfolk*, to
Ronald Malcomson, Esq., Elm Court, Temple.

Feb. 11th, 1897.

DEAR MR MALCOMSON,—I have had *such* a letter from Mildred, which she would be mad at my showing to you, so I mustn't do that. But I know you'd like to know what was in it. And it wasn't marked private, so there can't be any harm in telling you about it, can there, when you are such an old friend of Henry's, and at college with him too? Mildred says it is splendid of you to be so nice about money, but that it doesn't matter a bit your being poor, and that you deserve to be rewarded. I hope I wasn't very wrong in just hinting to her that you had told Henry how much you admired her. But I expect you will hear from her yourself. I mustn't tell

any more of Mildred's secrets, but if you get a valentine I think I should act on it. With kind regards from Henry,—Yours very truly,
 LUCY E. WATSON.

(10.) From *An Anonymous Sender*, to *Ronald Malcomson, Esq., Elm Court, Temple.*

Feb. 13th, 1897.

A valentine bearing the legend :—

“ 'T is mine to wait
 'T is yours to ask ;
 But why be late
 About the task.”

(11.) From *Ronald Malcomson, Esq., Elm Court, Temple*, to *Miss Mildred Trefusis Vanneck, Queen's Gate Gardens.*

Feb. 14th, 1897.

DEAR MISS VANNECK,—Had I not your gracious message before me I should never have been so extraordinarily presumptuous. I can only be heartily grateful to Mrs Watson for her indiscretion. Will you permit me to call this afternoon, and tell my own story?—Yours most truly,
 RONALD MALCOMSON.

(12.) From *Miss Mildred Trefusis Vanneck, Queen's Gate Gardens*, to *Ronald Malcomson, Esq., Elm Court, Temple.*

[A TELEGRAM.]

Feb. 14th, 1897.

Have sent you no message. Have no idea what you mean. Shall be out this afternoon.

MILDRED VANNECK.

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(13.) From *Ronald Malcomson, Esq., Elm Court, Temple*, to
Oliver Le Mesurier, Esq., The S—— Club, Piccadilly.

Feb. 16th, 1897.

MY DEAR OLIVER,—Don't be a fool about my magnificences. I will do your little commission with pleasure. Did I say that I was going to turn up small jobs and go straight for immortality? Perhaps. I was in a state of exaltation when I wrote. I was undecided whether I should move a wondering world to laughter or to tears; whether I should hold it breathless, horripilant, and fevered on the brink of some hideous discovery, or tickle its intimate sensorium with wire-drawn reasonings, with sophistry, and with morbid motive. I had my plan in each direction. A vision came over me of the resignation of clubs, of the renunciation of flippancy friends, and of a life's devotion to the task of a lifetime. Nothing should be so lustrous that my pen would not gild the gold; nothing should be so sordid that I would not dare to place it before my shrinking readers in all the picturesque of its naked truth. And so on, my dear fellow, and so on. You will wonder what this screed is aiming at. It's a confession. Oh, I have been such an ass!

Do you remember my telling you that a Miss Vanneck was stopping at Watson's when I was there? I admired her a good deal, and somehow while I was with her and admiring her I got into a gorgeous mood; I doubt if I have ever been happier. Don't misunderstand me. I wasn't in love with the girl. I never thought very much about her. But her society made me feel splendid. It made me realise what a genius I must be. Then I heard that she loved me. This seemed so sweetly reasonable of her that I wrote to her, and named an early hour

when I would come round to her house and requite her. I actually sent the letter. I'll swear I thought it was my only honourable course. I had said something in a scrawl to Watson about my admiration of Miss Vanneck. It was said in joke, and I don't even remember the words I used. Watson's wife, who is an idiot of a very aggravated sort, wrote off to Miss Vanneck that I adored her. Miss Vanneck wrote back to Mrs Watson, and said she was the same way, or something to that effect, and that if I got a message I was to act on it. Well, I got the message; I believed it; and I acted upon it. You can guess what is coming. It was a hoax! There's the brief story. If you tell it at the club, tell it of some other fellow.

Of course, I am going to get even with her. It may be a low, savage resolve, but it's mine. And I shall start on the business at the first opportunity that offers itself.—Ever yours,

RONALD MALCOMSON.

(14.) From *Miss Mildred Trefusis Vanneck, Queen's Gate Gardens*, to *The Honourable Ethel Pendre-Mold, Eaton Square*.

Feb. 17th, 1897.

DEAREST LITTLE ETHELINDA,—I've been a beast since I saw you last. You remember that silly valentine I bought when I was with you? I wouldn't say who it was for. The one Mills snorted at the idea of. I sent it to Mr Malcomson, the novelist. I told you I thought him rather nice, though very disagreeable. Well, I got to know that he was really thinking about me just in the way that I said he wasn't. You remember the sort of girl Lucy Watson always was, and she's just the same. Whatever you tell her that she oughtn't to repeat, she

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blabs at once. She told me what he had said of me. And perhaps he didn't really say it all. Then I told her that such admirable sentiments on the man's part ought not to go unrecognised, and that I should send him a valentine. I don't know what she made out of that, but I am sure that she repeated it to him in some shape or other. My dear, I only just stopped him by telegram from coming straight down here to fall into my arms. I have never tried to write and explain. Besides, I couldn't explain if I tried because I haven't anything to say, except that I didn't send the valentine. And he did annoy me by being so superior, and by thinking that he could walk round me all day, like Captain Foster does round a horse, with a straw in his mouth—Captain Foster's mouth, of course—and keep on reckoning me up in his mind, that I couldn't resist. And I couldn't guess Lucy would be so low, could I? I have written and told her what I think about it, and also that I didn't send the valentine. I shall always deny that, even on my death-bed.—Yours,

MILLIE.

(15.) From *Ronald Malcomson, Esq., Elm Court, Temple,*
to *Miss Mildred Trefusis Vanneck, Queen's Gate Gardens.*

May 20th, 1897.

DEAR MISS VANNECK,—Please do not throw this letter aside without reading it. I freely own that my impertinence has rendered such conduct quite justifiable, but I ask your clemency. I saw you last night at the Leycesters, and I know Mrs Leicester asked you if she might introduce me. The position is bound to occur again, and it will probably happen at the Molds to-morrow.

May I not be pardoned? Can we not be good friends?
Will you not let me try and make atonement?—Yours
sincerely,

RONALD MALCOMSON.

(16.) From *the same to the same*.

June 26th, 1897.

DEAR MISS VANNECK,—I shall be very glad to come to luncheon next Sunday, and hope I may be fortunate enough to see you at church parade, if you go. It is still quite full though people go away earlier every year. I hear the Molds have gone.—Yours sincerely,

RONALD MALCOMSON.

(17.) From *the same to the same*.

July 15th, 1897.

DEAR MISS VANNECK,—I am glad you liked the books. It's not every girl who would appreciate "Lord Horton's Dilemma." Much of the writing is so very difficult. In fact, some of those long rhapsodical passages could only in the ordinary way be understood by a woman. Man is not alert enough mentally to be able to leap with the author from point to point, just balancing on it and leaving it at once to spring higher, until the summit of some brilliant piece of imagery is reached. We can only wonder how on earth he got there. A subtle, broad-minded, sympathetic woman alone would be "spry" enough to see how it was done. Excuse the Americanism.

I suppose you will be off soon. I am tied here I expect.—Yours very sincerely,

RONALD MALCOMSON.

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(18.) From *the same to the same*.

July 25th, 1897.

DEAR MISS VANNECK,—Thank you very much for your letter. Of course I shall call before you go away, and say good-bye, but I shall see you again quite shortly. It is queer that you should have pitched on Clovelly for the summer holidays, but I am immensely glad to hear it. A great friend of mine has taken a cottage quite near there, and has asked me to come and fish, so I shall see you there. I find I can get away.—Yours very sincerely,

RONALD MALCOMSON.

(19.) From *The Honourable Ethel Pendre-Mold, Weggis, Lucerne, to Miss Mildred Trefusis Vanneck, Clovelly, Devon*.

Aug. 28th, 1897.

MY DEAREST MILLIE,—So poor Captain Foster's years of devotion go unrequited. He came up into the drawing-room—it was just before we left town—looking desperately business-like. There were several people there. He shook hands with two he didn't know, bowed distantly to mother who has had the slapping of him ever since he was born, and plunged at me. I cannot remember if he took me by the wrist, but it is my impression that he did. He led me into the little window at the end—you know, the one that looks out over the mews—and then he said, "That girl has chucked me." Then he knocked over a flower-stand, and rushed away without saying good-bye. Bob met him in the passage, and tried to trip him up. You know how good he is to Bob? Well, he wasn't good this time. We could hear in the drawing-room what he said, and mother's face was a sight.

One side of it pretended not to have heard, and the other side was full of outraged dignity. I laughed, and Bee Ossulstone winked at me, and mother saw her, and after she was gone said she wouldn't have a girl like that in her house again. And, my dear, this is hardly exaggerated. Mills will tell you that the flower-stand is a true bill, for it's one that she made herself out of an old packing-case some drawing-pins and a pot of enamel; but such is the pride of authorship that Mills said she'd rather it had been one of "them vulgar polished cupboards of her ladyship's!" Poor mother's Sheratons!

And talking of authors reminds me of Mr Ronald Malcomson. And he has behaved very nicely, and taken all the blame of that unfortunate business on himself? And your mother likes him so much? And he happens to be in Devon, does he, dear? Well, well!

This is a nice enough place, and the food's very good, and you know we don't have much comfort with dad unless it is, so that's a consideration. Mills isn't happy. She's been to Switzerland before; but it's not satiety that's the matter with Mills—it's exclusiveness. It's the tourists. She can't bear tourists.—Ever yours,

ETHELINDA.

(20.) From *Ronald Malcomson, Esq., Elm Court, Temple,*
to *Miss Mildred Trefusis Vanneck, Queen's Gate*
Gardens.

Feb. 13th, 1898.

A valentine, bearing the legend:—

"Fair lady, let me be thy knight:
Say, have I read thy heart aright?"

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(21.) From *Ronald Malcomson, Esq., Elm Court, Temple,*
to *Oliver Le Mesurier, Esq., The S—— Club.*

Feb. 13th, 1898.

MY DEAR OLIVER,—I wrote to you just about a year ago to say that I was going to get even. I have just sent that young woman a valentine—and I had the greatest difficulty in purchasing one—inviting her, in much the same words that she herself had used previously, to come and be made a fool of. I believe she'll walk into the trap. What seriously annoys me is that I shall hate having to spring the teeth on her if she does. I am not turning soft because it's a woman—what she did to me deserves punishment—but because it is this particular woman and I find now that I am awfully fond of her. If she had confessed it would be different. Then—well, then anything might happen; but she sticks out that she never sent me any valentine. If she accepts me, as I believe she will, I shall write by return of post and tell her that I have made a mistake. Then, having ruined my life, I shall go to Klondyke.—Ever yours,

RONALD MALCOMSON.

(22.) From *Miss Mildred Trefusis Vanneck, Queen's Gate Gardens,* to *The Honourable Ethel Pendre-Mold, Mold Towers, Flintshire.*

Feb. 14th, 1898.

DEAREST ETHELINDA,—I have been asked, and I am going to say yes. He sent me a valentine. I wish he had chosen any other way, as I didn't want to be reminded of that other hateful business. He must never know I sent that. Remember that you are never to let it slip out.

Lucy has promised faithfully. I have denied it now so deliberately to him that he must never know. *Never.*—
Ever yours affectionately, MILLIE.

(23.) From *Miss Mildred Trefusis Vanneck, Queen's Gate Gardens*, to *Ronald Malcomson, Esq., Elm Court, Temple.*

Feb. 14th, 1898.

MY DEAR RONALD,—My answer is, Yes. I suppose you were sure when you asked me that I should say Yes, and I don't know that I am ashamed of that.

I am, yours exactly as you would have me,

MILDRED T. VANNECK.

P.S.—I did send that other valentine. I can't tell you all I feel about it, and I am not going to explain or apologise, but I must tell you that I sent it.

M. T. V.

(24.) From *the Morning Post of Friday, April 29th*,
1898.

MALCOMSON—VANNECK.—On the 27th inst., at the parish church of Threxton, Yorkshire, by the Venerable Archdeacon Johnson, assisted by the Rev. James Vanneck, cousin of the bride, RONALD MALCOMSON, only son of the late Dr Ronald Malcomson, F.R.S., of Edinburgh, to MILDRED TREFUSIS, daughter of William Trefusis Vanneck, Esq., J.P., D.L., of Threxton Hall and Queen's Gate Gardens, S.W.

BAB'S MINISTRATION

THE ward was crowded. It was a tiny room, devised only to hold cases that called for isolation, and the lady-superintendent, who occupied the centre of it, was flamboyant in clothes and manner, and of her lone efforts would have somewhat over-furnished a larger space. And she was only one of seven souls therein. For on either side of her gorgeous presence—gorgeous in her full panoply as the head of a great nursing staff—stood, as was befitting, her satellites, younger and less prominent of bust than herself, modester in their linen and more restrained in the matter of chatelaine, but reproducing her air of mingled wisdom and prudishness, having the same unastonished demeanour, and the same tightly shut lips. All, that is, save one.

This group of good women served to throw completely into the background a narrow bed whereon lay a motionless man; yet his part in the little drama was a prominent one, for he was the patient and it was consideration for his serious plight that had thus filled the ward with curious bystanders.

He was still young, perhaps but thirty-five, although his wrinkled face bore the stamp of age. His unkempt and dark hair was scanty, and the straggling moustachios falling into the corners of his full flexible mouth were flecked with white. He lay uncovered save for a ragged shirt, and his shrunken frame bore out the tale of his senescent face. The shirt, however, was fine and fairly

clean; and on the middle finger of the lean and shapely hand was a cameo ring that betrayed him for a person of artistic sympathies. Motionless he lay, save for the rise and fall of the ribs in his stertorous breathing, and in the eyes of the watchers—of all, that is, save one—he was noteworthy as a case of opium poisoning; and with that their interest ceased. That his aspect proclaimed much of a sad career escaped the attention of minds upon pathological phenomena intent. Young yet old, gentleman yet vagabond, drugged and degraded yet possessed of some indefinable air of fastidiousness, all about him told of a steep downfall; but these indications of a life gone awry were presented to careless eyes. His symptoms and his treatment—what was the matter and what the remedy—engaged the undivided attention of all—of all, that is, save one, a white-faced girl, in whose glance more human pity could be detected.

Over him there hovered with business-like and responsible solicitude a young doctor, now feeling the various pulses, now auscultating the wasted chest and dropped shoulders, now peering into the sightless eyes, and always breaking off in futile irritation at the terrible stupor. The air of responsibility due to his official position as house-physician was increased by the quality of the patient, who remained aloof from the contest, entirely unconcerned at its issue, leaving the battle with death to be fought for him.

"That's the worst of these suicides," said the doctor at last, reaching for the battery; "they don't want to get better. If he tried a bit, I believe he would come out of this. As it is, he leaves us to fight it out if we care to. Turn it on," he added to the nurse in charge of the battery, and applied the electrodes angrily.

For a time no voluntary movement followed upon their application. The man's writhing limbs became quiet and the tortured features grew calm as the electrodes passed from their surface. At length he opened his eyes and moved slightly. But his interest in his surroundings was momentary, and after a few purposeless gestures he composed himself to sleep again, muttering. His tormentor dropped the handles, and taking him by the shoulders, shook him, bawling "Hi!" in his ear. The half-conscious man heard, and opened his eyes slowly, but shut them again, refusing to return to life at the call.

"If we knew his name!" said the doctor.

One of the nurses, the white-faced girl who had never taken her pitying glance from the sick man's face, stepped forth a little. The doctor looked up at her, and said "Well?" but she shrank back immediately into line.

So he returned to his bawling, until its uselessness forced him to cease. The man's lethargy remained complete, and the silence of the ward was only broken by his troubled respirations and the lady-superintendent's deep whispers as she interpreted to her nurses the effects of opium poisoning and the efficacy of the various remedies.

The doctor turned from the bed. He was a hopeful and genial sort of young gentleman, and neither the ill-success of his efforts nor the solemnity of the circumstances had driven the bright serenity from his face or impaired the amiable alertness of his manner. "The man has taken a very great deal, I fear," he said, turning to the group of watchers—"a very great deal, and the worst of it is we don't know how much. If he is in the habit of taking the stuff, he may pull through. Otherwise

it's a poor lookout. It's a handicap not knowing anything about him. Even his name would be something. I could keep on yelling it at him."

"Poor fellow!" said the lady-superintendent, wagging her appallingly elaborate head-dress. "Poor fellow!" she repeated smoothly. "Is he going to die, do you think?" Her face, as she put the question, expressed the amount of emotion that would have been adequate to an inquiry after the chances of his catching a train, but in deference to long observance of decent custom her accents were lugubrious.

"There it is," said the young doctor. "That's what's so annoying!"—and he beamed to show annoyance. "I don't know; I haven't the least idea. He's very near death now," and as he spoke he lifted one of the poor, flaccid legs from the bed, and loosing his hold from the ankle watched the limb fall heavily back upon the sheet. "As near as can be, and still alive! And I can't rouse him. And when I do I can't keep him with us. Perhaps we'd better be at him again. Which of you is going to look after the battery?" and he caught up the handles of the electrodes. As he did so, something made him look up and speak.

"Yes? What is it? Do you want to know anything?" he added. For one of the girls made a half-step forward, and her lips moved as if she would have spoken. She was the girl whose appearance of being on the verge of saying something had once before attracted his attention. Again she fell back into the line, and remained silent. But her eyes, large, grey, and swimming, remained fixed upon the doctor's face, with a look that was unmistakable in its appeal.

"Speak up," said he, in answer to the look. "What do you want to know?"

"Is he going to die?" she asked.

"Nurse Virginie!" said the lady-superintendent in indulgent remonstrance. It was a breach of etiquette for a nurse to address the medical officer in her superior's presence, and as such must not be suffered to go unproved. "Nurse Virginie, if you wait you will see."

The doctor, however, recked little of etiquette, and confirmed by his action the lady-superintendent's previously formed opinion of him—namely, that he was a man entirely wanting in most of the finer feelings. For he answered the girl without reference to the lady-superintendent's advice to her to patiently await developments. And he vouchsafed to the steady, mournful gaze a more serious response than had ensued upon the lady-superintendent's own question. He drew down the patient's eyelid and bent to look at the pupil. "Yes," he said, "I think he will die."

Then the girl stepped forward.

"I think I can keep his attention fixed," she said, "if you can rouse him sufficiently to make him understand me at first, and"—her voice faltered a moment, but then she went on bravely—"and recognise me. Will that be any good?"

"What!" said the house-physician.

"Nurse Virginie!" said the lady-superintendent, with no trace of indulgence in her voice this time.

"Well!" said the other nurses.

"Will it save his life?" asked the girl, disregarding the interjections.

"Couldn't say, I'm sure," said the doctor. "Of course, if you know him, and could make him talk, that would be a great thing—as it is——"

"Then," she said, letting her hand fall with an air of unquestioned possession upon the patient's unconscious brow, "then——"

"All right!" said he, dipping his electrodes into the water and preparing to administer the current again, "all right! I'll wake him, and you talk to him."

But the matter was not so easily settled.

"What does this mean, Nurse Virginie?" said the lady-superintendent.

"I know him," she replied, white to the violet line of her lips; "and if he can be got to know me I can keep his attention fixed."

She looked at the nurses, hesitatingly; they did not move. But the man understood. "Of course!" he said, turning sharply round. "Here, this isn't exactly an exhibition, you know; you can't help me any more, so perhaps you'd better run back to your wards."

"I desire that my nurses shall have every opportunity to learn," said the lady-superintendent.

"Then let them begin by learning to do as they are told," said the doctor, holding open the door to let them pass.

When they had filed out he continued to stand with his fingers drumming on the panels looking at the lady-superintendent. She did not move. He lifted his eyebrows in mute query, and she replied with a glance that would have formed an opposite pendant to Lord Burleigh's famous nod, for it implied well-bred fury at him, distrust of the girl at the pillow, the virtuous resolve of an officer to do her duty, and the uncontrollable curiosity of a woman to know what was going to happen.

Suddenly the heavy head moved on the pillow, and one wasted hand was outstretched, the pallid, dirty fingers working in aimless clutches.

"Jack!" said the girl.

"Eh!"

"Jack! Jack! Don't you know me?" she said.

"Yes," he replied, slowly, without opening his eyes; "I know you. You let me alone. Let me alone, I say. I'm dead. Isn't that good enough for you? I know you."

Still she kept on calling him: "Jack! Jack! Jack!"

At length he gave a little impatient shake of his head, as though, wearied by her importunity, he meant to make some effort to clear his drug-fogged recollection. And then he smiled and opened his eyes. "Why, it's Bab!" he exclaimed pleasantly, as his glance fell on her. "My little Bab! My virtuous little Bab! And toggled out like a nurse! Well, I suppose this is hell at last! Ugh! you devil!" he added, comprehending the lady-superintendent in a lazy stare. Then he closed his eyes again.

"You'd be better out of the room," said the doctor to that outraged female. "You see, he doesn't recognise you."

"I hope I know my duty too well," said the lady-superintendent. "I shall stay."

"Please go and stand by the battery," said the doctor, "where he can't see you. I'll get you to pull up the regulator when I tell you."

Again the stimulus of the battery was applied to the senseless form, and again the drowned intelligence swam slowly to the surface.

"Jack!" said the girl. "Jack, dear! Oh, speak to me!"

"What?" said he at length, in slow and natural tones.

"Now!" said the doctor, "now! Interest him. He's got to be interested. If you know him, and know his

tastes, tell him something. Tell him something that will please him or make him angry. Something that he will answer. Something that he will contradict. Make him swear. Make him cry. Make him think."

"Jack," said she, "Jack, I've come back to you."

"Well," said he, looking round, "what's it all about? I'm sure I don't know," and he closed his eyes again.

She drew a deep, shuddering breath, and then fell on her knees by his bedside. She saw that she was not to be spared.

"Jack, darling!" she said, "my Jack, I've come back!" and she passed her right arm, clothed in a spot-print and rigidly cuffed, beneath his pillow, and raised his haggard face to hers until their eyes met, and almost their mouths.

"I thought it was you," he said, without surprise; "but it's too late, Bab. You slipped me on the best of principles I've no doubt, dear; but you've done it—and since then I've done for myself."

She withdrew her arm from beneath the pillow, and passed it in its notable decency under the matted curls and round the lean neck. "O Jack! I have found out that you are all in all to me," she said. "Stay with me, dearest, and I will stay with you. For ever, Jack, and ever."

"Yes?" said he, indifferently. "Stay with you? As long as you're sorry for me, I suppose. But you will leave me as you did before."

"O my Jack!" she answered, putting her other hand upon his cheek.

"My wicked little Bab! My virtuous little Bab! Do you remember everything, dearest? How should you

not? For if you were everything to me, I was something to you. Save when those tags of home-teaching, masquerading as virtue, came between us. Why, Bab, it's years since the silly little name has passed my lips, and yet I feel as if it were but yesterday; which isn't a very original remark, dear, is it? But I'm not as funny as I was, you know. Do you remember the night when you found that you must leave me? Do you? Do you remember how wet it was? And when you opened the door, the wind blew the rain all over us. And I said I wouldn't turn a dog out such a night. And you said—— Well, never mind what you said." He stopped, and sleepily nestled down on to her spotless apron.

"Nurse Virginie," said the lady-superintendent, emerging from a stupor of horror, "you will now leave——"

"Go on!" said the house-physician. "Go on! You keep his soul with us, and he'll do yet." This therapist was truly oblivious of the sense of the girl's words, of the importance of her revelations, and of the demand that was being made upon her to force these confessions from her. All he saw was that she was interesting the patient, whose indifference to life was the chief obstacle to his living.

"Yes, dearest," said the girl; "I remember it all. And the little house at Moulsey—our little house, where I taught you to make an omelette, and you taught me to scull."

"Yes," he answered; "our little house at Moulsey! We were happy together until the day that you got a virtuous maggot into your head, that you must leave me because of that woman——"

"Your wife!"

"Well, because of my wife, if you like. What good could it do her that you should leave me? Was I likely to go back to her? You know what she was; and she knew what we were. Was it likely she would wish me to go back? It was impossible that she and I could ever be anything to each other again. And yet you left me at her request. Who gained? You lost your lover, though perhaps you got peace of mind or something; and me, well—I have qualified for hell."

"Is she alive?" said the nurse.

"I don't know. I hope not. No, I don't. I don't care in the least what has become of her. Don't let us waste time thinking of her. Let's talk of us. Do you remember the mountains and our quarrels over the paths, and the fruitless fishing exped . . . and the uncouth . . . and . . . and . . . Bab, don't leave me again." And his voice sank to a whisper.

"No," she replied.

"Never! Never!" he said smiling, but the words were hardly distinguishable. Then he shut his eyes.

"Oh, save him!" she cried, looking wildly up from the dying man.

"It's no good," said the doctor, after a moment. "He's dead."

"Nurse Virginie!" said the lady-superintendent, "you will leave the hospital to-day."

A SCREEN SCENE

Scene: A Drawing-room, with a high folding screen just within the door. The door is ajar.

COLONEL SAVILE. *Handsome, upright, well-preserved, 55.*

MRS VANSITTART. *Handsome, upright, well-preserved, 42.*

COL. SAVILE: My dear Mrs Vansittart, have I your permission to ask her?

MRS VANSITTART: I think we had better say no more about it. Lottie is too young—far too young.

(Charlotte Vansittart, pretty, demure-looking, 18, appears at the door, and, hearing her own name, enters softly and stands behind the screen with a book in her hand.)

COL. SAVILE: When you say that Lottie is too young, I suppose you mean that I am too old. My grandmother married at Lottie's age.

CHARLOTTE *(to herself)*: What does he mean? What does it matter to me how old he is, or to him how old I am?

MRS VANSITTART: Our grandmothers! They did all sorts of things. One of mine kissed all her husband's electors. I do not consider you too old for love—only too old for Lottie. Lottie is much younger than her age. She has never thought about such things. You will only frighten her.

COL. SAVILE *(with some warmth)*: Am I so very grim or terrible?

CHARLOTTE (*to herself*): Why, he's speaking for himself!

MRS VANSITTART: No; not terrible or grim, but——

COL. SAVILE: But?

MRS VANSITTART: But you must not expect her to jump into your arms.

COL. SAVILE: Good heavens! I don't. I am not decrepit, but I am far too old for romping. May I speak to her?

MRS VANSITTART! Yes; certainly. You are warned, however. Do not expect too much.

COL. SAVILE: And I have your good wishes? You have no objection to me personally, or—to my family (*drawing himself up*).

MRS VANSITTART: My dear Colonel, none whatever. None, of course. You are an unexceptionable *parti*. I like your name, and I like your family. It would be foolish to deny that I am glad that my daughter's suitor is rich. But I want to warn you. Lottie is very young. She may make light of these things.

CHARLOTTE (*to herself*): I *am* glad Jack's father is rich.

COL. SAVILE (*moodily*): Well, you're not highly encouraging. What will she say?

MRS VANSITTART: She will say that she must speak to me.

COL. SAVILE: I think she is quite old enough to have an opinion of her own. And you? What will you say?

MRS VANSITTART: Oh, I am very sympathetic if I am not very encouraging. I shall tell her that you are a thoroughly honourable gentleman whom we have known for over twenty years——

COL. SAVILE: I don't know that the length of time matters.

MRS VANSITTART: And that you have an undoubted position, and a well-merited reputation.

COL. SAVILE (*bowing*): And then?

MRS VANSITTART: And then? But in the name of modesty, what more do you want me to say?

COL. SAVILE: You misunderstand me wilfully. What will she say—Lottie?

MRS VANSITTART: You wish me to prophesy? I will. I believe I know my girl. She will say that she does not know anything about such things; that she will marry you if it is my wish, and at once, if I wish; that she is very glad to know that I like you; and that she believes that she rather likes you herself. Now, my dear old friend, friend of twenty years' standing——

COL. SAVILE (*impatiently*): Yes; never mind dates.

MRS VANSITTART (*repeating her words slowly*): Of—twenty—years' standing—is that answer the kind of thing you want?

COL. SAVILE (*after a few moments' pause*): Yes; I want Lottie. The rest will follow. I will ask her to-day. Will you send for her now?

MRS VANSITTART: Um! And Ida? What will Ida say? She is older than my girl, and will not relish giving up the keys to Lottie—who will certainly lose them at once. And Jack?

CHARLOTTE (*to herself*): Now for Jack!

COL. SAVILE: Ida is a dutiful girl to her father, and will welcome Lottie as a companion. Lottie will not see much of Jack. I am sending him abroad.

MRS VANSITTART: Oh, poor Jack! What has he done? Really, boys are too troublesome nowadays. I suppose

it's one of us? (*Colonel Savile nods.*) Is she on the stage? I am—so sorry; I am so fond of Jack. He's such a nice boy, and always full of news; and he has been so nice to me—lately.

COL. SAVILE: It's not as bad as all that. But I'm not going to have it. He came swaggering into my room this morning and said he was engaged.

MRS VANSITTART: What? Jack? Really! How nice! Who to?

COL. SAVILE: Er—I don't know; I didn't ask. I was very much annoyed with him. At his age! And he can't support a wife. I told him it was a piece of absurd impertinence to get engaged without asking me.

MRS VANSITTART (*doubtfully*): What did he say to that?

COL. SAVILE: He laughed, and said I wasn't up to date. *Up to date!* He goes abroad. Engaged! At his age!

MRS VANSITTART: Twenty-four.

COL. SAVILE: Yes; twenty-four.

MRS VANSITTART: One year older than my husband when he married me. I must say I am rather on Jack's side. I think he's old enough to choose for himself. And do you mean to say that you have not even asked your son the name of the girl he is going to marry?

COL. SAVILE: He's not going to marry. He hasn't asked me about it.

CHARLOTTE (*to herself*): He ought to be here now to ask mother about it. I think I had better get out before I'm caught. (*She puts her book on the floor, retreats softly to the door, rattles the handle, shuts the door with a clap, and advances into the room from behind the screen.*)

MRS VANSITTART: Here is Lottie!

CHARLOTTE: Yes. Here is Lottie! How do you do, Colonel Savile? I am so glad to see you this afternoon.

COL. SAVILE: It's very kind of you to say so. I'm sure, Lottie—ahem—that is, Miss Vansittart—

CHARLOTTE: Oh! please call me Lottie. I like it. It sounds so nice and natural. And I'm sure it must be right, as you've known us so long. How many years have you known Colonel Savile, mother?

COL. SAVILE (*hastily*): Don't mention them. Have you any particular reason for being glad to see me this afternoon, Lottie? If so, it is quite a coincidence, for I have something particular to say to you this afternoon.

CHARLOTTE: Really!

(*Servant announces Mr John Savile. Upright, smiling, 24. He shakes hands with Mrs Vansittart and her daughter, and nods to his father.*)

MRS VANSITTART (*aside*): Good gracious! I hope they won't quarrel here. (*To Jack.*) I'm very glad to see you, Jack. You're becoming my most punctual visitor. Is there any news? You've always heard everything.

JACK (*looking at Charlotte*): Yes; I've some news for you, Mrs Vansittart.

COL. SAVILE (*aside to Charlotte*): And you have something particular to say to me, Lottie?

CHARLOTTE: Yes. It's the same thing as Jack wants to say to mother, so I'll say it for both of us. We are engaged.

MRS VANSITTART: Engaged!

COL. SAVILE: Who? Jack and you?

JACK: Yes. Lottie and me.

(All four stand in silence, looking from one to the other.)

CHARLOTTE: And Jack has come to tell you about it, mother.

MRS VANSITTART: Engaged! Nonsense! You're far too young. Jack has come to *tell* me, indeed! Come to *ask* me, you mean. But it's nonsense.

COL. SAVILE *(aside, to Mrs Vansittart)*: Lottie is too young; she is younger than her years. She doesn't know anything about such things. She will speak to her mother first. She will marry if it is her mother's wish.

CHARLOTTE: You see, we knew it would be all right. As for being too young, Jack is as old as father was when he married, so he must be old enough to choose for himself. Don't you think so, mother? And I'm as old as Jack's great-grandmother was when she married—and I'm sure that sounds awfully old. Quite old enough, at any rate, to have an opinion of my own. Don't you think so, Colonel Savile? *(Hastily)* Jack told me about his great-grandmother. *(At which Jack looks mystified; and Mrs Vansittart walks carelessly across the room to a point where she can see behind the screen.)* And we knew Colonel Savile did not object to me, because he told me a few days ago that I should make such a nice companion for Ida. And you said yesterday that you were getting quite fond of Jack. *(Breathlessly)* So we knew it would be all right.

COL. SAVILE *(to himself)*: She doesn't know anything about such things. She will speak to her mother first. She must not be frightened. O Lord!

MRS VANSITTART *(aside, to Lottie)*: You've left your book on the floor. If you tell Jack what you heard, you disgraceful little girl, I will never forgive you.

A Screen Scene

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JACK (*repeating Charlotte's words*): So we knew it would be all right.

MRS VANSITTART (*smiling*): I suppose it is all right, Colonel Savile?

COL. SAVILE: I suppose so—that is, of course.

THE HELPLESSNESS OF MISS PICK*

I

It was on a lovely June evening that I met Miss Mary Pick—one of those dark, balmy, breezy evenings which incite the spirit of a man to wild things, holding out to him the promise of adequate return for any display of the adventurous temperament. Now, I was at this time a persistent seeker after adventure. My imagination told me that in mighty London dramas—sinister, stupendous, tender, droll, or with any qualification you will—were being played hourly around me, and the knowledge put me out of conceit with my prosaic life, leading me to scan the agony columns of the journals, to read the partially filled forms which litter the counters of the telegraph offices, and to beat the street in an aimless hunt for the unexpected. It even impelled me to follow persons of pronounced rectitude to their blameless homes in Hampstead, something in their demeanour having savoured to my longing taste of criminal courses. But, alas! through years of patient waiting, and no less patient endeavour, the promises which I felt certain were being

* It is several years now since the events occurred which I have set down here, but they are grafted on my memory so securely that I have been able not only to tell what happened, but also to reproduce in great measure the words which passed between the actors.—J. A.

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made to me at every street corner remained unfulfilled. Not an episode whose quality could be magnified by the most exuberant fancy into oddity ever offered itself for my participation. My days remained hopelessly blank of unusual events, and this was the more irritating to me because of my belief that could I come into contact with sensational circumstances, I should be able to act, thanks to my long consideration of all possible situations, with promptitude, self-possession, and effect. I began to despair. To those few who knew my hopes and my failure to realise them I confided my belief, entailed upon me by my negative experiences, that an adventure is a thing which cannot be deliberately entered upon, eluding the anxious searcher to fall to the lot of the blunderer, who neither deserves to meet with it, nor is able to cope with it, nor is grateful to his stars for being allowed to make the attempt. My repinings, as will be seen, were premature.

It was nine o'clock. The street in which I was teemed with saunterers to and fro in the pleasant air and fading light. The place was a favourite resort with me, for it was one of those great veins of street circulation, into whose absorbing current all that was abnormal in the lesser streams must eventually fall. Adventure might lead me to a quiet spot, but the chances of meeting with adventure were immeasurably greater in a crowded thoroughfare.

As I strolled on, observant of the multitude around me, the influence of the atmosphere or some premonition less obvious of comprehension warned me that on this evening there would be events. The feeling was strong on me, I remember, as my eyes fell upon a tall, slender girl moving some dozen paces ahead of me. I was attracted immediately by her air of inquiry. To me, whose evening

walks were always tours of discovery — although I had never discovered anything — this air was unmistakable. The girl was doing what I was doing myself. The swaying movement in her elegant figure was due to frequent little half-turns made with the intention of scanning more closely those whom she encountered.

As I was watching her a creature in raffish clothes, with his hat over his ears, and his cigar drooping from the extreme corner of his mouth, stepped rapidly from the wall, and, adapting his stride to hers, began to talk to her. What she said to him I could not hear, but there was no time wasted or lucidity spared in the saying of it, for the fellow slunk off at once crestfallen and silent. The girl walked a few yards farther, stopped, looked round, turned abruptly, and, still with the same deliberate air, honoured me with a frank stare as she met and passed me. I turned and followed her. A few minutes later the little episode which has been described already repeated itself. This time the intruder upon the lady was a portly young man, who ranged himself by her side with the confidential air and assured manner that should only have followed upon provocation. He began to talk to her immediately, and his repulse was not so speedy as that of his patently dissolute predecessor had been. The lady slackened her speed as though to observe him narrowly, and drawing nearer, I caught a fatuous phrase or two. He was still emptying his stock of compliments upon her, when she said abruptly: "Will you have the kindness to walk on?" and again turned sharply to resume her original direction.

This brought her for the second time face to face with me. As before, she looked steadily into my eyes, and this time I thought that there was a hesitation in

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her manner, as though she were inclined to speak to me. It was no desire for vulgar intrigue that animated me; this, I hope, I have made sufficiently clear. I hunted adventure with avidity, and would have welcomed the opportunity of succouring a woman because the position of the friend to distressed femininity was a familiar part in my imaginings—most stories of adventure had such a situation for the *jeune premier* to fill; but I hoped for no ulterior reward from the heroine. This lady wanted to speak to me. Was she seeking merely a companion in an idle hour? In that case, I should disappoint her. Or did she lack a man's brain in a time of need? Hoping that it might be so, I determined to pursue her.

The girl walked steadily on through streets, squares, and crescents, till the great thoroughfare was left far behind, and the turmoil of central London began to die away in the shabby, desolate little roads. Now and again, while rounding a corner, she would shoot a swift glance down the street along which she had just passed, and in so doing she could have seen me treading steadily in her wake, but she made no sign of being aware of my proximity. Suddenly, conversation began, for, on wheeling sharply into a dingy, ill-lit square, I found her waiting for me.

"I beg that you will not track me farther," she said.

"I ought to apologise for following you so far," I responded, "but I thought you were in need of me. Is that so? Can I help you? Will you give me a trial?"

She moved a step nearer to me, and scrutinised me closely.

"Are you a member of the Berkeley Club?" she asked at length.

"I am."

"Of course. But are you, in truth and reality?"

For answer I handed her one of my visiting-cards.

"Is the Berkeley Club a large club?"

"Not at all. In fact, it is a very small one."

"It is astonishing," said the lady. "You have, I suppose, some curiosity concerning me, or you would not have followed me to offer me your help. Now, I do want help. I want it very badly, and I was in search of it when you met me. And this is the astonishing thing—a man, to be of service to me, should be a member of the Berkeley Club."

"Then," said I, "make full use of a member now that you have found one."

"I may have to ask a great deal of you."

"A man can only do his best, but you can command me to that extent."

"Come along then," said the girl, walking up to a half-opened door a few paces away, and disappearing over its threshold into a mean little house.

I followed.

II

The girl led the way up a creaking staircase to the third floor, where she entered a room dimly illuminated by an evil-smelling lamp. Although it was now but ten o'clock in the evening, the house was wrapped in deep silence, and I should have thought it uninhabited but that from one of the doors which we passed on our ascent, a fat white face peeped out on us, wearing an encouraging smile, so expansive in its character that the dim and murky atmosphere could not conceal it.

"My landlady is not a nice person," commented my conductor.

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The chamber in which we found ourselves was apparently the girl's sitting and sleeping apartment combined, but the unconventionality of introducing a man thereto troubled her not a whit. Seating herself on the foot of a small iron bedstead, she motioned with her hand to me that I should take a wicker chair that stood upon the scorched and ragged hearth-rug, and eyed me silently while I settled myself into its frail embrace.

"Have you your cigarettes or whatever you smoke? Then start smoking," she added, when I had informed her that I never stirred abroad without pipe and pouch, "and I will tell you my story, and will be as brief as possible. My name is Mary Pick. I am a companion (if you know what that is), and my last situation was at Martenhurst with Lady Marten, the great owner of racehorses, where I was very happy. She is a lady of many tastes, and has an enormous number of acquaintances and friends. Her correspondence requires a secretary to manage it, and I managed it to her satisfaction for a considerable time. But a few days ago she dismissed me without a character, as the diamonds of one of her guests were missing, and she thought that I had stolen them. I have nothing to say against Lady Marten's treatment of me. Circumstances were against me. Had not Lady Marten felt certain of my guilt, she never would have sent me adrift. But she was confident that I was the thief—I should have been the same in her place—and she dismissed me promptly, hoping that if I made a quick retreat I should escape police interference. She told me so. Oh! Lady Marten was good to me."

She paused, as if expecting from me some acquiescence in this sentiment, but I found nothing to say.

"I wish you to know everything," continued Miss Pick;

"only understand that I don't blame Lady Marten. One evening, a week ago yesterday, a Mrs Lothbury, who was staying at Martenhurst, came to her bedroom about eleven and exchanged her dinner-dress for a tea-gown, preparatory to a visit to the smoking-room ; for Martenhurst is a very free-and-easy place. She took off a diamond necklace and placed it in its case, then lying on her looking-glass. She distinctly remembered doing this. In the morning the case was still in its place, but it was empty. The necklace was gone."

"And where do you come in?" I asked.

"You will see that I come in right here," replied Miss Pick, catching at my slanginess. "I had gone to bed that evening sooner than usual, for I was going to London on the following morning, and expected a tiring journey. I was going on Lady Marten's business, but there was no necessity for me to start at the early hour that I did, before anyone in the house was stirring. It chanced that the morning was a lovely and bright one, and I was awake, and in mind for a stroll. I thought it would be pleasant to walk to the station, and I got up and did so. Lady Marten's commission occupied ten minutes, but knowing that I was not wanted at Martenhurst, I stayed in London four hours or so. I went to the National Gallery, I sat in St James's Park, I had luncheon at an aerated bread shop, and caught an afternoon train home. When I got back to Martenhurst everyone stared at me curiously. I remember that I thought I must have an unusually large smut on my face, a legacy from the railway. I went up to my room, and while I was looking in the glass and finding that I was passably clean, a maid came to ask me to go to Lady Marten's room at once. I went to her. She was much distressed at what she had to say, but

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she said it all the same, for she believed me guilty. She is a woman who prides herself on the vigour of her opinions, and, having once made up her mind on a subject, contradictions would have very little weight with her. This is what Lady Marten told me. Mrs Lothbury had placed her necklace in its case at eleven o'clock on the previous night, and had left the case on her dressing-table, where it still was when she came up to bed later. At this hour—that is to say, at eleven o'clock—all the women-servants had gone to bed, save two lady's-maids, who were able to account for themselves. As I have told you, I went to bed early. Now my bedroom was next door to Mrs Lothbury's, so that at the time when the jewels were left in this unprotected manner, I was without doubt able to take possession of them. The following morning they were missed. Search had been made in every possible place for them, and had proved useless. The boxes of the servants had been examined at their owners' wish, their masters and mistresses had insisted that their trunks should be treated in a similar way. Nothing had been found; and the possibility that the stolen goods were already removed from the house had occurred to the constable. He then learned that I had left the house unseen, and at an early hour in the morning, having had a good opportunity to commit the theft. Lady Marten told me all this, and a lot more detail that I need not trouble you with—and then I said I would leave. She gave me ten pounds; and I left the same evening." As Miss Pick ceased she turned upwards the palms of the fat, strong little hands which lay in her lap with the usual gesture of one who has said all that there is to say.

"Good Heavens!" I exclaimed, considerably astonished

at this sudden termination to her recital. "There wasn't a scrap of evidence against you. Do you mean to say that Lady Marten dismissed you because of the silly remarks of a country policeman?"

"No. She suspected me, and I left of my own accord."

"But how idiotic!"

"It was idiotic," said the lady; "but you don't think clearly when your best friend is hinting that you are a thief. I declared I was innocent, and got away as quickly as I could."

"But if the necklace is still missing, everyone is sure to think you are guilty."

"The groom who drove me to the station told me that the servants did not believe I was guilty, but that the guests were unanimous in condemning me, with the single exception of Sir Gilbert Burleigh."

"Who is Sir Gilbert Burleigh?" I asked. I did not believe Miss Pick's story in its entirety, but the knowledge that she possessed a champion, when I was thinking of filling the place myself, annoyed me.

"He's a member of your club," she replied—"the Berkeley."

I said I didn't know him, taking care to imply by my accents that I didn't want to know him.

"Well, I hope you'll know him soon," Miss Pick went on, disregarding my brusqueness. "Sir Gilbert Burleigh is a betting man, like many of Lady Marten's friends, and he backed me. Everyone at the luncheon table said I shouldn't come back except Sir Gilbert, and he said I should. The groom told me that the other gentlemen laid the odds—I haven't managed Lady Marten's correspondence without knowing what he meant—and that Sir Gilbert took tens to as big a figure as he could get."

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I said nothing, for I was determined not to be interested in Sir Gilbert Burleigh.

"It wasn't fair betting," she added, "for he knew that there was nothing to keep me away. You see, Sir Gilbert Burleigh is the thief."

This unexpected and bold assertion startled some words of protest from me, but she went on smoothly.

"I'll tell you why I say so. About eleven o'clock on the evening of the robbery Mrs Lothbury came up to her room. I was at that time sitting at my window, which was open, and overlooked the garden. The five or six fiery specks that I could see moving slowly backwards and forwards in the darkness below were the cigars of the guests smoking on the lawn. I remember that I was idly attempting to guess by the respective heights of their mouths who the smokers were, when I heard and recognised Mrs Lothbury's step as she passed my door. A few minutes later one of the glowing points on the lawn separated itself from the others and came towards the house, and Sir Gilbert Burleigh, whose voice I knew, said something to the group he was deserting about meeting them later in the smoking-room. As he spoke, Mrs Lothbury left her room, and I could hear her descending the stairs. Almost immediately afterwards a man entered her room. He stayed three minutes only. It was Sir Gilbert Burleigh, *and he took the diamonds*. I am so confident that I am right, that I can see him do it."

"I'm afraid you haven't much to go on," said I.

"No ; I haven't," assented Miss Pick, "still I'm right. Sir Gilbert is no ordinary friend of Mrs Lothbury. Her husband, who is thirty years her senior, trusts her, or, at any rate, lets her do as she likes ; but she is a most reckless, foolhardy woman, and Sir Gilbert's flirtation with her during

their stay at Martenhurst had been forced upon everyone's attention. I don't think she ever did any real harm, but she is silly, fast, and bad form. She told Lady Marten when she went upstairs that she was going to put on a tea-gown and sit in the smoking-room. When Sir Gilbert came into the house, he was on his way to the smoking-room in accordance with his pre-arranged plan, for he kept his cigar in his mouth, and I could smell it in the passage. He saw a light appear in Mrs Lothbury's windows, which, like my own, faced the lawn; and he ran up to her room. No ideas of propriety would have prevented either him from coming to her bedroom door to talk to her, or her from listening to him there, but when he knocked there was no answer. He went in, probably with the idea of playing some practical joke—at Martenhurst they were always 'ragging' each other, as they called it—and he saw the case on her dressing-table. He opened it, and the sight of the diamonds was too much for him. He had been losing money heavily all the week. He stole the necklace, and he had it in his pocket while the police were in the house."

Miss Pick stopped speaking, for at this moment a large woman appeared in the doorway, carrying a little piece of paper with one hand, and a guttering candle in a tall candlestick with the other.

"Good evening," she said to me, as I was scrambling out of my chair. "You needn't go till you want to. This is Liberty Hall (pronounced Libbatyori), and I shall not intrude for more than a minute. My lodgers know I never intrude." Here she pulled herself up proudly, scattering grease in a circle around her. A little rocking in her figure detracted from the dignity of her pose, while a doubting look spread over her face,

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indicating that she was becoming vague as to the object of her visit.

"I said she was not a nice woman," murmured Miss Pick.

And now the sight of the scrap of paper in her hand recalled the alcoholic landlady to a recollection of her intentions. Leaning confidentially towards me, she explained that having only one servant at the present time she found it best to have as many commissions as possible executed simultaneously, so that the girl was not always running in and out of the public-house—a thing which would give any place, however strictly conducted, a bad name. She then proceeded to entangle herself in a maze of conversation, following now this track and now that, arriving over and over again at the same place, and retracing her steps with no sign of fatigue and no consciousness of her repetitions. Her moods came and went with her words, and her actions, in their environment of candle-grease, stumbled after her moods. At the passages of her harangue which bore on her unmerited poverty, she was racked with grief; bacchanalian sentiments, in exposition of the creed that the short and merry life had its advantages, were accompanied by cackling laughter; while an attitude of dignity was assumed as she described her moral rectitude and the delicacy of her behaviour. This last was not without its dangers, for when drawing herself up to her full height she would nearly fall backwards. But in all the numberless vicissitudes of her words and demeanour she remained resolutely civil to me, while in her occasional references to Miss Pick she betrayed an unctuous motherliness.

With some difficulty, I gathered from her outpourings

that her maid-of-all-work was going to the public-house, whose hospitable doors would shortly be closed for the night, and that she was recommending me, if Miss Pick or I wanted any refreshments, to give my orders at once. "You see," she went on, not unshrewdly, although so unsobberly, "there's a little matter outstanding, so that you can't just give your orders and up it comes. I have to pay ready money myself." Here she held out the piece of paper, and I took it. It was Miss Pick's bill for the past week, amounting to some three pounds.

Miss Pick smiled, the landlady smiled, and I paid.

"Come along with me, dear," said the landlady to Miss Pick. "Come along, and have a bit of supper"; saying which she lurched from the room, jingling the coins in her hands.

"I know your name," said Miss Pick, as, to my astonishment, she rose with alacrity; "for I suppose it was your own card that you showed me."

"Certainly," I replied. "John Allen is my name."

"Well, Mr Allen," she said, "I am more grateful than I can say, and far more grateful than I must seem. I will write to you at the Berkeley Club, and, until you hear from me, I hope you will suspend your judgment of me. Perhaps you will follow us down, and we can show you your way out?" She tripped down the stairs to the undulating accompaniment of the landlady's generous candle, and in the dirty little hall shook hands with me, bidding me good-night with the manner of a hostess speeding a casual guest, and showing no concern at the old woman's repeated assertions that there needn't be any hurry, and that she didn't want to intrude.

III

I went to the Berkeley Club on the following afternoon with no real expectation of finding there any communication from Miss Pick—at least, so I told myself. The shapeless doubts which had accompanied me home to bed on the previous night had crystallised by the morning into a certainty that I had been the victim of a hoax. The house and the landlady were indubitable in their character, and I saw no good reason for doubting that Miss Pick was out of her proper sphere. As for the rigmarole about stolen jewellery, the improbabilities of the story were glaring.

If there had been such a jewel robbery, everything pointed to Miss Pick's guilt; but, in all likelihood, the felony had never been committed. There were things I could not quite explain to myself, as, for example, why the girl should have unfolded so lengthy a tale when a short one would have answered her purpose just as well and have been less strain on her imagination; why she should have desired to wait until she reached her disreputable dwelling-place before speaking to me, when it would have been as simple to have begged in the streets; and how she managed to maintain her air of modesty and good-breeding, and yet be a lodger in that hideous house. These things were not clear; they did not fit in with a theory of vulgar extortion: but, despite them, there could be only one reading of last night's occurrences—only one—and deep in my breast I strove to bury any idea that I had encountered at last the long-sought adventure. As I entered the Berkeley I was careful to refrain from inquiring if there was a letter for me; yet I do not know why I stayed at the club until dinner-time,

unless it was that I expected the promised communication from her; or why, finally, I sat down to my evening meal in a vile temper, if it was not because I was disappointed. But with the soup the waiter brought me a letter. It was a little note, beautifully written, its even lines, wide margins, and elegant capitals betraying its writer for the practised amanuensis that she had claimed to be, and its purport being to invite me to meet her that evening at the Marble Arch.

Miss Pick was before me at the trysting-place, and at the first glance I saw that she was a partner of whom any man might be proud. She was well-dressed, well set-up, handsome, and self-possessed. Of the clothes, the figure, and the manner, there could be no doubt. The good looks were more a matter of taste. She was pale and almond-eyed. Her straight, dark brows all but met over a small nose whose tip was ever so slightly up-tilted. Her large mouth, vividly red, had a deep shadow between it and a pointed chin, while shadows also defined her prominent malar bones. She was no longer a young girl—her age being, probably, about twenty-six—but she was a capable, courageous, and interesting woman.

As I took all this in, and found it confirmatory of the favourable impressions I had formed on the previous evening, a feeling of complacency began to replace my halting mood. The doubts of the prudence of associating myself with Miss Pick, which had assailed me on my way to the rendezvous, faded when I saw before me a confederate of such irreproachable *tenue*. I became her ardent knight.

"It is good of you to come," said she; "for I am sure you would not be here if you did not mean to help me."

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"I will do all in my power," said I; "but I don't quite know what you want me to do."

"I want you to help me to convict Sir Gilbert Burleigh of the robbery of Mrs Lothbury's diamonds."

"But suppose——" I began.

"Yes, I know," she broke in; "suppose he did not take them. But he did take them. The only way to prove it is to find them in his possession, and that is what I intend to do. Had I accused him when Lady Marten was dismissing me, Mrs Lothbury would have pointed out that Sir Gilbert would not enter her room in that way, Sir Gilbert would have denied that he had done so, and Lady Marten would have found it very awkward to help me, though I could have made her believe me if I had spoken out. Nor was I certain then as I am now of the manner of the theft. I left the house an hour and a quarter after first hearing of the robbery. The time barely sufficed for me to pack my things. You will easily understand that I had not thought the circumstances all out before I left Martenhurst; but I have done so since. Instinct told me that Sir Gilbert was the thief, and also how best to punish him. If I had put him on his guard by as much as a look, I should have lost my chance of carrying through the plan which immediately came into my mind. I only hesitated about one thing. I wished to keep a close watch on him, which I could not do after leaving Martenhurst. That risk I was forced to run, and I did not think it a very serious one; for, if I was right, he must soon come to London to dispose of the necklace. He has come now—and now that it is time to act I am powerless."

As far as I could see, I was equally powerless; but I forebore to confess my misgivings in so many words,

preferring to indicate generally that I was at her service.

"I have not been idle," she continued. "You must have wondered at my conduct last night; but I was hungry. Directly I reached London I obtained the assistance of a private detective whose name was familiar to me, for I had read his advertisements. It was necessary that I should keep Sir Gilbert's movements under constant observation from the moment that he reached London. I had no money in my possession beyond Lady Marten's cheque, and I soon found that ten pounds would not go far with a private detective. He spent over eight pounds in two days, and then asked for further 'instructions,' as he called them, but he meant 'instalments.' I was then forced to tell him that, as I had no money, I could employ him no longer, which did not seem to surprise him so much as my hiring him had done. In truth, if I had been boundlessly rich I should have discharged him, for I had found that he could be of no service to me. He could only spy on Sir Gilbert in the street, and I wanted much more than that. So I paid him his eight pounds, and when I had done so I had exactly two sovereigns left. He was not absolutely useless. I learnt from him that Sir Gilbert had not yet returned to town, and he also gave me Sir Gilbert's addresses at a club and at some chambers. This was three days ago. I found the club and the chambers, and decided to watch the latter. I was rewarded by a good omen. Within an hour of my taking up my stand near the front door, a hansom passed a few inches from me piled with luggage. If Sir Gilbert had not been engaged in piloting the cabman with his stick, he must have seen me. He went in, and I wandered up and

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down the street till he came out, when I followed him to his club, where he went about dinner-time. At two in the morning he came out, and walked home. Having seen him to his chambers, I went home myself. In the morning, the landlady of the house where I was lodging asked me to leave. She was good enough to say that she thought I was respectable, but added that no one would believe it of me if I kept such hours. I took my boxes to the cloak-room of the nearest railway-station, and spent the day and a large portion of the night trying to continue my watch over Sir Gilbert. As the evening grew late, I remembered that I had no lodgings. I spoke to a girl whom I met in the street, and she recommended me to the place where you visited me. She said that if I went there, I should find that no objection would be made to any hours I might wish to keep—and she told the truth, if not the whole truth.”

“Well, you have pluck,” said I; “but you’re running awful risks of being insulted.”

“Running risks of being insulted!” she echoed; “why, I have invited insults, and have waded up to my neck in them. I don’t mind insults. But I do mind being unable to carry out my plans. I mind very much.” We were sitting in the park by this time, and she raised her parasol as she spoke, and struck the gravel smartly with it.

I murmured something consolatory, and she went on:

“Perhaps my behaviour of last night is more comprehensible to you now. I must have a man’s help, and the man must be a gentleman. I cannot watch Sir Gilbert myself. In trying to do so, I have attracted the unfavourable notice of his club porter; and in the street where his chambers are a policeman has asked me what

the business was that kept me loitering there. I have hunted for the friend I need. For two evenings I have submitted to all sorts of insolence, in the hope that I might meet a helper, but until last night my search has been fruitless. Have I been fortunate this time? Directly I saw you I began to hope. I planned that you should follow me home, as I felt certain that if you did so, you would free me from my debt in that odious place. If I had told you my story in the street, you might not have believed me, or have had patience to listen to me. My money was done, I could not escape without paying what the woman said I owed her, and she refused to supply me with more food till I paid her. I left you uncere- moniously last night. I was hungry—so hungry.”

Such was the chance of adventure that opened itself before me, and with some qualms as to the prudence of the course I decided to embrace it. My doubts of Miss Pick's candour were not wholly dissipated. It was not clear to me why she had submitted tamely to Lady Marten's suspicions, nor why she had gone into the streets to search for a champion instead of having recourse to the police. Yet I could not decline to help her. Loud and long I had clamoured for such an opportunity. Bitterly I had bewailed the monotony of nineteenth-century life, with its curse of lassitude, its dearth of event, and its vulgarity of sentiment. I could not so far go back on myself as to refuse to be associated with this story of crime and injured womanhood—a story, moreover, with which I had become acquainted in this stimulating manner.

“And now that you know my story, what do you think is the best plan?” asked Miss Pick.

“The man must be watched,” said I; “and I will do it for you.”

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I felt that this could not be a very striking suggestion to Miss Pick, for she had herself pointed out that such was the precise assistance that she wanted. I should have preferred to place before her an original plan of action, but no such plan occurred to me. But she seemed not at all disappointed to find her champion with no scheme of his own; rather, she appeared pleased to see that he was prepared to act on the suggestion that she had made to him.

"I will take lodgings in the same house as Sir Gilbert Burleigh," I continued; "then I shall have him under my supervision at all hours."

"And you can search his rooms," said she.

"Well, yes," I admitted. "I suppose I can do that if it becomes necessary."

"Oh! of course, you will not do it unless it is necessary. And you can find out all about him, his hours, his friends, in fact, his daily life?"

"Yes, I suppose I can, by watching him."

"Well, if not by watching you can by speaking to the servants."

I liked the idea of speaking to the servants even less than the idea of searching the man's rooms.

"Of course, you will not do that either unless it is necessary," continued Miss Pick, who, perhaps, perceived my scruples.

So we agreed that I should enter the next morning upon the task of righting Miss Pick; and we further arranged that I should report progress to her at the same hour and place in the evening.

But I refused to allow her to go home as soon as our plans were thus settled. I could not bear to think of her in that awful house, and I insisted upon giving her some supper.

I found her an admirable companion. She made no further reference to her affairs, except that she explained the puzzling discord between her clothes and her purse. She was determined, she said, not to sell her clothes, of which Lady Marten had given her an ample supply, until she was at the last gasp of hunger, as to do so would be to deprive herself of all prospect of securing employment or credit; while it might even prevent her from obtaining justice and revenge on Sir Gilbert. "I could not expect you to give me supper," she said, "if my boots were cracked, and you would not have wanted to help me if I had been totally unpresentable."

I accompanied her home, and as we walked we made believe on what we passed. I did most of the talking, but she was an exciting listener. Here a frowning old red house, insulated by its thick-grown garden from more modern tenements, would seem to us apt shelter for a maiden of sixty sitting ever in bridal garb awaiting the lover who had long since been hanged for his hideous offences; and I would persuade Miss Pick to peer through the rusty wrought-iron gates in quest of a white expectant face at one of the many windows, or a quaint figure trailing nuptial robes in the seclusion of the moss-grown paths. Here a triangle of sward, some little high-lying corner which a straighter route had left on one side, would suggest the duello; and we would people the deserted patch with elegant rivals, steel in hand, with grave surgeons, be-ruffled boon-companions, and retainers carrying flaring links; and would be on the alert at the next corner, where a fair lad, whose trunk-hose but ill matched the curves of his bosom, might perchance be seen holding her paramour's horse. Here was a really singular thing! That gloomy barn at the bottom of the narrow mews!

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Those privileged to mount the crazy wooden stair—a privilege equally hard to earn and infamous to enjoy—and to enter that little door, a mere hole cut in the board midway between the ground and the gutter line, would step at once from the meanness of a muck-yard to the splendour of an oriental palace; for there, unsuspected by his humble and virtuous neighbours, and equally unsuspected by Scotland Yard, lived a great prince of crime amid the priceless spoils of his lawless career. And so on, and so on; and when at length I brought her by a devious route into the vicinity of her lodgings I felt that seldom, if ever, had I enjoyed myself so entirely. Miss Pick, too, looked happy.

“I must get you out of this awful place at once,” I said as I bade her good-night.

“You shall do what you like with me,” she answered, “if you will watch Sir Gilbert for me.”

IV

Sir Gilbert was described in the usual books of reference as follows:—

“Burleigh, Sir Gilbert Forrester, of Todenham, Norfolk, elder son of the late Sir Gilbert Winnington Burleigh, Bart., by Alice Caroline, third daughter of Robert Forrester, Esq., M.P., of Neaton House, Norfolk; b. 1861; s. his father, 1880. Residences: Todenham Hall, Norfolk, and 2 Stanley Street, St James’s, S.W. Clubs, Blenheim and Berkeley.”

To No. 2 Stanley Street, therefore, I betook myself early the next day, and hired a small set of rooms which happened to be vacant. I was much exhilarated by the

piece of good fortune which thus enabled me to enter easily and immediately upon our campaign. While I was packing my bag, my feeling that I was performing feats on Miss Pick's behalf was strong on me. But when I was established in my new abode, and free to consider what my first move should be, I found, to my intense disgust, that I had no idea how to take any practical steps towards the performance of the task I had undertaken. Here I was on the third floor; how should I obtain full information of all that passed on the first floor? How should I place myself about Sir Gilbert Burleigh's path and bed? How should I discover where the jewels were hidden—if, indeed, Sir Gilbert had stolen them, for Miss Pick's story furnished only a faint presumption of this? I could have reeled off general methods for Sir Gilbert's discomfiture, complete, sweeping, and in accordance with much precedent; but a definite plan of action for this particular case seemed hard to come by. I could make Sir Gilbert's acquaintance at the club by getting some man who knew him to introduce me to him, but that seemed rather an unfair way of treating the introducer. And even if I did get to know Sir Gilbert in this way, and if by cultivating a friendship for him I got myself invited to his rooms, I still should not be in a position to ransack his cupboards, desks, or cash-boxes. I might try to pump him, but if he was guilty he would surely take alarm at the first remark bearing distantly upon the matter. Decidedly, I was not much further forward because I had stumbled on rooms in the same house with Sir Gilbert, and equally decidedly my mind was blank as to the best plan of procedure. Then one of Miss Pick's suggestions occurred to my recollection. I might cross-examine the servants. A vision

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of the communicative housemaid falling an immediate victim to my shrewdness occurred to my mind, and the idea, though I had been prepared to scout it on the previous day, was no longer repugnant to me, for to do anything was more pleasant than to sit idle in submission to a sense of impotence. Having prepared a few pregnant interrogatories, most of which were dependent upon the answers that I might reasonably expect, I rang the bell. Service in Stanley Street was prompt, and before the wire had ceased to vibrate, the man-servant was in the room. This rapidity discomposed me. My pre-arranged conversation had in it certain direct references to cap-ribands which were inapplicable to a man-servant, and I could only formulate a request for hot water.

In great disgust, I dressed and went to the club.

Sir Gilbert Burleigh was in the dining-room, where he was acting as host to several friends. With some vague idea of keeping him under observation, I took a seat within earshot of his table, and became elaborately absorbed in my newspaper. When I rose, some two hours later, to keep an appointment with Miss Pick at which I was to report progress, the futility of my machinations more than their meanness had plunged me into the depths of self-abasement. Varied information I had certainly obtained by following the table-talk of my neighbours, but it was all of no service to me. Thus I had learnt of the slogging powers of one Bill Morgan's "right." These were proved to be tremendous by a story of an in-offensive-looking prize-fighter of unexceptionable manners, who was insulted by a blustering snob unskilled in the noble art. The female element was not wanting to the story, for it was felt by an artistic narrator that nothing but the dictates of modern chivalry could excuse the

severity of the punishment that the snob received. Then Amelia's chance for the Leger was commented upon, with due regard to the fact that the mare, though speedy and a good animal, had been allotted too much work; while Fortunio, who had been notoriously off colour at Epsom, was now giving his trainer every satisfaction and might be expected to turn the tables on her. Sir Gilbert fancied an outsider called The Shark, and thought 100 to 3 a nice price. A gentleman recently from Cambridge told a story of a proctor, a pretty cousin, and a Jesus man. The speaker was the Jesus man, and the proctor was badly left. A review of the latest trial was given by the youngest member of the party, in which it was briefly demonstrated where the counsel for the Crown had been weak, where the counsel for the defence had been short-sighted, and where the judge had shown himself an unscrupulous partisan. The speaker pointed out that the jury were probably prejudiced, that the expert witnesses were certainly venal, and that the laws of his country required amendment in several directions—which he kindly indicated.

Fortified with this varied information, I went out into the summer night to meet Miss Pick. I had on the tip of my tongue a mildly humorous description of the mental anguish that I had undergone during the day. I intended to rally myself upon my failure to accomplish anything, and perhaps to invite a little sympathy for the loss of self-esteem which I had sustained, as well as for the discomforts consequent upon a sudden change of lodging and habits. Miss Pick's first word showed me that a tone of jocularitv would not be well received. She got straight to business.

"What have you discovered?" she asked.

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"Nothing," said I.

"What steps have you taken?" she continued.

"None. I can't take steps; I don't know how."

"Have you any plan?"

"Well, it sounds wild," I replied, a little nettled at this cross-examination, "but it appears that you might put £3 on The Shark for the Leger, and with the money you would win hire one William Morgan to knock out the baronet and carry off the diamonds. Lest William should be punished by the law for his violence, I advise you to write to a young gentleman—a member of my club—about his case. The young gentleman will make it all right for William by appealing to the sense of the greater jury."

Miss Pick was staring at me with undisguised astonishment. When I stopped, "I have made a great mistake," she said.

I begged her not to look so serious, and reproached myself for having talked such foolishness to her. I then described the sense of absolute incapacity that had overtaken me, and possibly exaggerated the contempt which I felt for my own uselessness. "I couldn't even ask the servant a question," said I; "and if I had he wouldn't have answered me. He would have gone straight to Sir Gilbert and warned him that I was prying into his affairs. Of course, I expected a woman."

"I doubt if a woman would have been more use to you," laughed Miss Pick, "if you were intending to bribe her with cap-ribands. Ribands are very cheap, servants do not want to be reminded that they have to wear caps, and they are not allowed to put ribands into them."

"I told you I was no use," I repeated.

"I think you've done very well indeed," said Miss

Pick, soothingly. "You now live in the same house with Sir Gilbert, so that you can observe his hours, his habits, and his friends. You have observed them, and it isn't your fault that so far you have found out nothing. Besides, are you sure you have found out nothing?"

"Nothing."

"You are too modest, I think. You say that if you had questioned the man he might have informed Sir Gilbert. Sir Gilbert uses the same servant then?"

"Yes."

"Sure?" said Miss Pick, with a bright smile, which apologised for her persistent questioning.

"Sure," said I; "the housekeeper told me so when she explained the service of the house to me."

By this time we had reached the park. We turned in at the Marble Arch, and as we passed a bench Miss Pick asked me for a pencil. She then sat down, took a scrap of paper from her pocket, smoothed it out on the seat of the bench, and, bending over it, scribbled a few lines rapidly. Then she motioned me to sit by her side.

"Sir Gilbert Burleigh took those diamonds," said she, "and they're in his rooms now. He daren't pawn them, for their loss is known to the police, and he has had no opportunity of selling them yet. We must search his rooms, and we shall find the necklace."

"If he took them," I began protestingly.

"He took them," she broke in.

"Well, he took them," said I. "And he hasn't pawned them. But he may not have hidden them in his room."

"If they are anywhere else we shall find a memorandum or a receipt or some letter referring to them."

"He would carry such a document about with him."

"Then," said Miss Pick, "he must be searched also."

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But we will begin with his rooms. I will do that. Please look at this," and she handed me the little piece of paper on which she had just scrawled a few lines in pencil.

I read it. "My dear Miss Pick,"—she had written—"I enclose my latch-key, and you know the room. I am sorry I cannot be there to meet you, but I am engaged this evening. The parcel is on the table.—Yours very truly, JOHN ALLEN."

"P.S.—Please apologise to your father for the trouble I have given him."

"What do you make of it?" she asked.

"It is quite clear," I replied. "I am to give you my latch-key, so that you may let yourself into Sir Gilbert's rooms. You bring this letter with you, or, rather a copy of it in my handwriting, so that the people in the house may believe that you think yourself in my rooms with my approval, if they should disturb you while you are searching. It appears, also, that you are on business of your father's, which gives an air of great respectability to the proceeding."

"Now, just see how much you have already done for me. You admit me to the house, almost to his room,"—she stopped abruptly. "I suppose," she added, "his door will not be locked?"

"No; there's no outer door. You just walk in—that is, if his rooms are like mine."

"Another thing you've found out for me is that there is no valet to fear. I have only to choose a time when Sir Gilbert and the man-servant of the house are both away and I am almost certain not to be interrupted. If the housekeeper does catch me, it will be my bad luck, and I must trust to good luck for my explanation. I shall try to-morrow night."

I promised to send the man-servant of the house on an errand to a distant suburb on the following evening and to keep Sir Gilbert in my eye from the time that he left his rooms for his dinner until his return. If he seemed to be shaping his course for Stanley Street, I undertook to get there first and warn Miss Pick. Miss Pick would take up her watch at the corner of Stanley Street early in the evening, that she might see the man-servant start on my errand. "You will make him carry a conspicuous parcel," said she, "so that I may know that he is off on your business and cannot get back for some time."

"He shall go to Hampstead Heath," said I, with reminiscences of my favourite novelist, "and carry a blue band-box directed to Miss Lydia Gwilt, c/o Mr Sergeant Cuff."

"I leave all details to you," said Miss Pick, gravely, "and thank you so much for helping me. Now I must go home, for, in obedience to your wishes, I have left Liberty Hall, and am living in a highly respectable family circle which expects me to be in early. Will you give me some luncheon to-morrow, when I can tell you how I have got on?"

Shortly before eight on the following evening Sir Gilbert Burleigh left his rooms. I followed him, wondering vaguely what I should do if he were to dine at a private house, or at some other club than the Berkeley. It appeared to me that in either case I should have to hang about the pavement dinnerless until Sir Gilbert appeared again. Why had I not thought of this before, and provided myself with biscuits and a flask in preparation against a long wait? And again it became deeply impressed upon me that I had no great aptitude for the detective's career. I was neither provident enough nor attentive enough. In short, I was in a false, not to say a ridiculous position. I had gone into

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this business as a champion, and had felt the charming glow of a Quixote, but the distressful lady had taken into her own fair hands the mending of her fortunes, and her successful precision made my abortive attempts ludicrous. What had I accomplished of my own initiative? Nothing. My information gained by living in Stanley Street had been useful certainly, but who sent me to live there? The lady. How swiftly, and yet how surely she had laid her plans! How bold she was to carry them out! How pat that letter had dropped from her pencil! I could imagine the quiet systematic search that she would conduct. I could even picture her caught rifling Sir Gilbert's desk, and extricating herself with peace and honour from the embarrassments of the situation. For surely never was woman in odder fix, or engaged on an odder task than she had been on the night when first we met, yet I could not but remember that all the awkwardness and uncertainty had been on my side.

As it happened, I had no need to regret my lack of portable refreshment, for Sir Gilbert Burleigh took his way to the Berkeley Club direct. I dined with one eye fixed upon him, and followed him into the card-room after dinner. He started at once to play *béziq*ue, and by the expectant air of half-a-dozen gentlemen who rapidly grouped themselves round his chair and that of his opponent, I gathered that it was a match on the result of which there was some betting. I took up my position behind the baronet.

It gratified me to see Sir Gilbert begin by losing heavily, for in losses at play I saw a valid motive for the crime which I only half-believed him to have committed. Game after game was played, and game after game went against him. The betting became high, and I found myself

impelled to back the chair behind which I was standing if only to account for my prolonged interest in the duel, and in the course of the next two hours I realised that I had chosen a highly expensive method of "shadowing" my man.

At last the end came. Sir Gilbert, who had played his losing cards with exemplary temper, smiled as a particularly bad piece of luck lost him the tenth game in succession, and said to his opponent, "Johnnie, I've had enough. I'll stop now. How much do I owe?"

Apparently he had been betting with everyone in the room save me, and as each mentioned a sum he laid a pocket-book on the card-table and began jotting down the items on a memorandum form hastily torn from it. I sat down at Sir Gilbert's elbow and wrote a cheque, for my evening's espionage had cost me nearly forty pounds. While Sir Gilbert was arriving at the details of his debts his pocket-book lay wide open before me, and the top paper therein caught my glance. It was a thin pale yellow scrap, and as I let my eye wander over it I learned the hiding-place of Mrs Lothbury's diamonds. No one was marking me, for all were absorbed in their calculations. When I had dried my cheque I laid the blotting-paper over Sir Gilbert's pocket-book, and under its sheltering cover passed a purloining hand. With an audacity as well as a wickedness for which I have never ceased to blush, I stole the paper. No result could justify the act.

I gave my cheque to my creditor, and made for the door immediately, ere anyone should see in my face the terror that was hurrying my heart and singing in my ears. I might be working in the cause of virtue, but none the less I had committed a mean theft.

Sir Gilbert looked up as I was leaving the room. He

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was intending, I think, to say a few words of regret for the misfortune which had necessarily attended his backer, but I was practically out of the room before he had time to speak.

On the other side of the door, which I did not close behind me, I paused and listened in terror. Perhaps I had been seen? Perhaps I was going to be denounced?

"Queer beggar!" said the baronet, whose smooth deliberate speech I recognised. "Who is he? He's cracked. The committee ought to be told about him. Yesterday he sat two hours over his dinner. He was at the next table to us. He was alone with a newspaper, and he never turned over a page once. This evening he was betting like a lunatic. I could hear him going wrong all the time. He doesn't begin to know the game. He's cracked."

"Seems a harmless peaceful sort of fellow," said another man, probably the one to whom I had just handed my cheque, and who felt charitable towards me.

"Oh! I don't think he's dangerous," replied Sir Gilbert.

V

My first thought when I found myself outside the club was to run at full speed from the scene of my crime, but my second reminded me that I might be followed by Sir Gilbert or by someone who had seen the raid upon his pocket-book. In such a case, if I were making no attempt at flight, I could pretend with plausibility that the paper had come into my possession by accident—I could say, for example, that I had placed it in my pocket without noticing what it was, and believing it to be my own—but if I were a fugitive I should be self-

convicted. So I hardened myself against the strong temptation to rush wildly into the night, and proceeded at a leisurely pace along Piccadilly until I was quite satisfied that no one was marking me. Then I turned into a bye-street, and examined under a lamp the paper I had just stolen. It proved to be, as my glance at it while it lay in Sir Gilbert's pocket-book had told me to expect, the receipt for a bag deposited in the cloak-room of the London terminus of the Great Southern Railway. It bore the date on which Sir Gilbert had been seen by Miss Pick to return to his rooms in Stanley Street. The inference to be drawn was that Sir Gilbert at the conclusion of his journey from Martenhurst to London had found it convenient not to bring this particular bag to his chambers, and the omission fitted exactly with Miss Pick's theory of Sir Gilbert's guilt. He would not attempt to pawn the diamonds while their loss was still so recent. He would, therefore, have to keep them somewhere until it was safe to deal with them. At his rooms his possessions were liable to be overlooked by servants, and to keep some receptacle permanently locked might attract curiosity. It would, at any rate, entail upon him anxious care if his keys could never leave his hands. To deposit the bag locked at the railway station until he had made up his mind what should be done with it would certainly be his best course, if it contained the necklace; and that it did so I now believed.

In robbing Sir Gilbert I had taken a step which was fraught with considerable danger, even if I was not detected at the moment. It came upon me as a shock to remember that I was living in the same house with him. I decided not to sleep at my rooms that night, for I had no desire to meet him while the receipt was still in my hands; but

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to get a bed near the railway station where the momentous bag was housed that I might go early in the morning to secure possession of it. I was supported in my resolution not to return home by the recollection that I had lent my latch-key to Miss Pick that she might make her raid on Sir Gilbert's chambers. Hence I could not get into the house without rousing the servants. It would be imprudent to do this until I knew what adventures my accomplice might have met with. If she had been caught, and had given my name as a guarantee of her honesty of purpose, it would be well that I should learn from her lips exactly what she had said before attempting to confirm her story; especially as my action in sending the servant on a false errand to the north of London must, when regarded with a suspicious eye, assume a sinister appearance.

I slept badly, and with red eyes and unshaven chin presented myself at the cloak-room as soon as it was open to the public. As far as I could see—and I was very careful to look—there was not a person present on the platform who was paying any attention to me, while experience and common-sense alike, told me that the porter who acted as clerk at the cloak-room would be certain to give the bag unquestioningly to the holder of the ticket corresponding to it. But I shivered with apprehension as I handed the little paper to the official. And not without reason. He disappeared into the recesses of the cloak-room for a brief space of time, and then returned to say that he could not pick out the bag. I told him unreflectingly what day it had been left in the cloak-room, and on arrival from what destination. He went back to look for it, but again emerged empty-handed. A great quantity of luggage had been left in the care of

the railway company during the week, was his excuse, and would I kindly tell him what the bag was like? For a moment I was paralysed. Should I boldly own that I was not the owner of the bag, and did not know its colour or shape? Or should I take the chance of saying that it was an ordinary Gladstone bag, when it might be nothing of the sort? Or should I run away? The last course meant the abandonment of the search for the necklace, and was not to be thought of; but each of the others had their perils. I caught myself longing for Miss Pick's assistance, and wondering whether she would have acted as I did.

"Let me inside," I said, "and I can pick it out in a minute." He gave me back the receipt, and unbolted a low door the top of which formed his counter, remarking that the luggage placed in a certain corner was that which had been longest on the premises. I walked to the bottom of the chamber, and in a dim light began delving for the bag, my only guide being the knowledge that somewhere upon it would be a label bearing the number written on the receipt. When I had been some five minutes groping unluckily in baggage of all sorts, I decided to ask that a porter should be sent to help me, and to explain my ignorance of the outside appearance of the bag. I had taken a step forward towards the entrance, when I saw leaning through the opening above the counter Sir Gilbert Burleigh.

Clearly he had discovered the loss of the receipt, and had hurried to the station with intent to recover his bag somehow, or to lay an embargo upon it. He stood bending forward with his elbows resting on the ledge at the top of the door through which I had just passed. Framed in the light as he was, I could see every line of his face,

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and it was peaked and drawn. He seemed to be staring back at me, but I was hidden by the gloom from his gaze. It was a queer situation, and I who had asked angrily for adventures, was certainly getting a bellyful of them. Ten yards away from Sir Gilbert I stood with the stolen receipt in my hand, trying by its means to steal the bag. I could not get out without passing him, for his lounging posture effectually blocked the door, and at any moment he might be admitted to the cloak-room to identify his property, when he would probably recognise me. If he did, he would remember that I left his company only a few hours ago, and would inevitably connect my early presence in the cloak-room with the loss of the receipt—or so my guilty fears told me.

Sir Gilbert was speaking in continuation of a conversation already begun: "You must let me have it without my showing a receipt," he said. "Of course, I can satisfy you it's mine."

"I don't think I could do it, sir," said the clerk. "What's the bag like?"

"It's a brown dressing-bag with my initials on it. I can spot it in a moment—and should like to pay for the trouble I am giving."

"Well, sir," returned the clerk, "if you state the contents of the bag, and will then open it in front of me I'll take the risk; but it's irregular."

I had been bracing myself up to plunge for liberty throughout their dialogue. I was certain that the clerk's next words would suggest that Sir Gilbert should enter the cloak-room. But when he said that Sir Gilbert must state the contents of the bag, I felt that I had a chance of safety, the chance depending on Sir Gilbert's guilt. If the diamonds were in the bag of course he could not

state its contents. His answer came rather slowly, and sealed my belief that Miss Pick's theory of the crime was sound.

"All right," he murmured, "I'll go home and have another look for the receipt. I haven't the key with me, and it would be a pity to burst the bag open." With that he lifted his elbows slowly from the door and walked away. He had not mentioned his name, nor the day on which he had deposited the bag in the cloak-room. Had he happened to have told the clerk either of these things I might have had difficulties, for the official must have been struck with the fact that two men appeared to be wanting the same bag, and that one, the one who made no offer to describe it, could produce the receipt for it, while the other, who said that he had lost the receipt, claimed that he could identify the article immediately. But my star was in the ascendant, for Sir Gilbert had not only made no awkward confidences but had supplied me with just the details that I wanted to gain possession of his property. With my new information I found the bag at once and walked on to the platform with it. Sir Gilbert was not in sight, and I got into the first cab and told the man to drive me to an obscure Turkish bath in the north of London. I felt that I must hide myself while I had the bag in my possession. My rooms and my club were closed to me, and I was still in evening dress. In a Turkish bath costume is of minor importance.

I had chosen for my luncheon with Miss Pick a small restaurant in Soho, which enjoyed the reputation of being a house of call for conspirators. Anarchists and dynamitards were believed to haunt the low, dingy salon, and rumour had it that a historical assassination had

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been planned in one of the private dining-rooms. She was standing on the steps waiting for me, for I was a few minutes late. I had been unable to shake off a feeling that I was being tracked, and had made a detour so that I might walk down two long straight streets where no one could follow me without being detected.

"You're late," said she abruptly, as I arrived.

I looked at her, and saw that the pleasant smile with which she was wont to greet me was gone. I explained that from motives of prudence I had come by a circular route.

"What rubbish," she snapped. "That is—Oh! I beg your pardon for being so rude, only I don't feel in a mood for joking. And what a horrid place this is you have brought me to."

"We'll go in and eat," I rejoined; "and you shall tell me afterwards what you think about it. It's a most suitable place for plotting. We'll have a private room."

At this hostelry they could, and, I dare say, still can, provide a Brown Cantenac that has been known to move stockbrokers to poetry. I suppose it is necessary for persons who upset dynasties in the cause of the down-trodden poor to have a working knowledge of the way emperors live. It takes from their actions the appearance of irrational hate, to know the evil habits of the classes against which they war. Something of this I said to my guest, but could elicit no smile from her, who until this time had been so responsive to my moods. I could guess what was causing the difference. She had examined Sir Gilbert's rooms, and had failed to find either the diamonds or any memorandum pointing to their hiding-place. Nothing was therefore

left from her point of view save personal violence. Sir Gilbert must be searched, and she was doubting if her frivolous accomplice were equal to the task.

"Tell me about last night," I said, when our plates and glasses were full, and the waiter had withdrawn. "Did you find anything?"

She confessed that her industry had been fruitless. She had found her way into Sir Gilbert's rooms and had remained there unmolested for nearly two hours, but the most elaborate investigation of his effects had resulted in nothing—"at least," she reserved, "in nothing worth mentioning." She complained that Sir Gilbert's rooms were not easy ones in which to find a missing article as they were inconveniently crowded with bibelots. And she ended by saying, as I expected, that now but one step was open to us. "Sir Gilbert must be searched."

I shook my head, believing that the need for such a proceeding was gone.

"Ah! you think I should give up," she cried, flaming out, while her cheeks grew red and her glance was levelled defiantly at me. "You think I should hesitate. Never. I will find the jewels. I will convict that man. And if you won't help me I will find someone who will—someone with more heart for the task. I am tired of stupid talk."

I thought it was time to make my little effect. "Here is Sir Gilbert's bag," I said, reaching under the table and bringing up my prize; "and, unless we have been on a false scent from the beginning, it contains the necklace." Miss Pick looked her amazement. "I'm not mad," I continued. "This is a bag that Sir Gilbert Burleigh deposited at the Great Southern Railway station on the evening of the day that he left Martenhurst. I have

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borrowed it. If you had found the necklace in his rooms I should have returned it intact, but now we will open it. If he brought the diamonds away from Marten-hurst, and if they are not concealed in his rooms, they are probably within it." I placed the bag on the table between us, and handed her a key. "I stopped at a locksmith's," I explained, "and got a key, but I would not look in until I had heard what you had accomplished last night."

Miss Pick opened the bag. It contained the usual furniture—the silver-topped bottles, the probes, the hooks, and the pincers, without which no such bag may be sold—and at the bottom lay a small brown paper parcel. This she took out and opened. She had found the necklace.

"I will now go and call on Sir Gilbert Burleigh," I said; "for you must be righted immediately."

Miss Pick sat looking mutely into the bag where she had replaced the parcel, and a little smile flickered at the corners of her mouth.

"How can I thank you?" she said. "How can I thank you? You have been so clever and brave. But you must allow me to see Sir Gilbert myself."

At this I demurred. It seemed to me much preferable that I should deal with him. He might appeal to her mercy and cozen her out of her vengeance. In me he would find an implacable adversary; for I was full of wrath at the mean circumstances of the crime, and was anxious to prove myself an efficient champion of Miss Pick. No; clearly I must see the man, and drag a confession from him. And I said so.

"You cannot meddle," she insisted, "without owning that you have done things of which you are ashamed. I must not let you mix yourself up in the matter further.

I must not. I beg, as a final favour to me, that you will not interfere with Sir Gilbert."

"You have always wanted to do it yourself," I replied.

The intimate communion in which I had lived with the girl for the past week seemed to me to have come to a sudden end with the success of our joint quest. When she proposed to take the sequel into her own hands I felt as though I was being dismissed, having served her turn.

She came round to the back of the chair on which I was sitting, and placed her hand gently upon my shoulder. "I can never thank you sufficiently," she said in low tones into my ear, "for all your kindness and generosity to me, and your faith in me. And, after all, you found the diamonds. Why not leave the rest to me?"

I looked at her, and drew her hand from my shoulder to my lips, and I knew how much I feared to lose her.

She read my eyes. "Ah," she said, softly, removing her fingers from my grasp, "so you have been working for a reward. Then we will go together to Sir Gilbert Burleigh."

VI

When we were announced to Sir Gilbert, he was sitting before a writing-table which was heaped with papers, while all around him on the floor lay more papers, clothes, books, open bags half-packed, and open boxes half-emptied. His state of mind can be conceived, if I tell what had happened to him as I now know it. The previous night, on his return from the club, he had found his despatch-box broken open, and important

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private letters stolen from it, while many unmistakable signs revealed to him that his rooms had been thoroughly ransacked. Hardly had he rallied his nerves against the disquieting effects of this knowledge than he made a second and more terrible discovery. The receipt for the bag that contained the necklace was missing from his pocket-book. At the earliest opportunity he had been to the railway station, but found that he could not recover his property unless he made a declaration of its contents. He could not hazard a guess who had made the burglarious onslaught upon his despatch-box; and here again he could not tell anyone of the robbery, or seek the aid of the police, for his conscience and his intelligence alike warned him that this double attack on him had been inspired by someone who was acquainted with the true facts of the loss of Mrs Lothbury's diamonds. Should he remain, half-formed plans for his arrest might be put into execution. Should he fly, half-formed suspicions of his guilt would be confirmed. Moreover, he had no money at his disposal, for the losses of the previous evening had been substantial. To do nothing but wait was intolerable, and to do anything but wait was fraught with peril, as long as he was in ignorance of the identity of his foes. He had begun to pack, he had ceased to pack, he had begun to pack again, and now was sitting in blind terror awaiting fate.

Miss Pick gave her name to the servant, and followed hard upon it, while I entered behind her prepared to support her, but feeling dimly conscious that she wanted no help. As she came in carrying the bag, the wretched man knew that the bolt had fallen. He was ruined. He looked from her to the bag, and then sprang forward to catch it from her hands. She gave it to him without resistance.

"We have opened it," she said, "but everything inside is just as we found it, save that we have placed Mrs Lothbury's property in safe keeping."

"What are you going to do?" he panted. "Am I to be arrested?"

"You have to deal with me alone," replied Miss Pick, calmly, "and what I do depends upon what you do."

To my surprise there was no ring of indignation in her voice, hardly a tone of recrimination.

"I should like to sit down," she continued. "I have had a good deal to think about lately, and feel rather tired"; and she smiled a little languidly as she dropped into a chair. "Restitution must be made in the two directions where it is called for—to Mrs Lothbury who has lost the jewels, and to me who have lost my character; and we do not wish to move until we know your intentions."

After a few moments of silence Sir Gilbert began: "How can I ever set myself right in your eyes? My needs are no excuse, the temptation is no excuse, the uselessness of the theft is no excuse, yet I have never dared to make any use of the diamonds."

Miss Pick listened with affable silence.

"I can assure you," he continued, making a strenuous attempt to reach a high level of pathetic oratory, "that I deeply repent of my madness—for I acted in a moment of madness—and I beg you to believe this, and to carry my fervent assurance to your friends, that if they will give me a chance I will live for the future, I swear it, in such a way as shall convince them that their mercy has been well bestowed. Ah! if you knew the haunting shame——"

"Pardon me for interrupting you," broke in Miss Pick,

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"but you are not keeping to the point. We do not want you to apologise for what you have done, but to undo it."

"I will return the jewels to Mrs Lothbury at once, if you will trust me with them, and will tell her the whole truth. I will show you the letter, so that you may see that I am prepared to make a full confession."

"You would still be in Mrs Lothbury's debt, because she has undergone much annoyance through her loss," said the lady; "and how do you propose to clear my character?"

"I will go straight to Martenhurst, and tell Lady Marten all."

"Lady Marten and Mrs Lothbury are not the only persons in whose estimation I have suffered. Mrs Lothbury very possibly does not believe that I am the culprit, and, if she does, I do not mind. Lady Marten thinks that I am guilty, but that is because I have allowed myself to be condemned by circumstances. I could have reinstated myself in her ladyship's estimation at any moment, by telling her of my suspicions of you. I did not choose to do so, because I had another plan. Lady Marten and Mrs Lothbury should be told the truth, but the people to whom it must be made clear that I did not steal the necklace are the visitors who were at Martenhurst when the robbery took place. I must be publicly cleared."

"But what can I do?" he asked.

And I wondered what he could do. A confession might be managed without grave detriment to himself, if his confidant were selected with discrimination. He might plead sudden temptation both with Mrs Lothbury and Lady Marten; but if the confession required of him by

Miss Pick were to take the form of a written statement to be circulated in society generally, in which way Miss Pick would be publicly cleared, he might as well suffer the penalty of the law. For his social degradation would be no greater.

I, too, looked inquiringly at the lady, who answered Sir Gilbert. "There is only one way in which my character can be thoroughly reinstated, save by the police. You shall marry me."

"Madam!"

"Sir!" rejoined Miss Pick, smiling.

"I must suppose that you are taking advantage of the miserable situation in which I have placed myself to ridicule me."

"No," said the lady; "there is no intention to ridicule you. Mine is as serious a suggestion as yours was a serious crime. I intend to enjoy again the good opinion of those by whom I am now unjustly suspected of theft. You are in the world to which these people belong. I have always intended to enter that world myself. When you marry me all suspicion of me will be at an end. If you return the jewels to Mrs Lothbury I shall not be cleared of the accusation of theft, and the fact that you are sorry for me will not assist me to clear myself. If you make, in addition, a full confession to Lady Marten, begging her, at the same time, to let your statement be known to all who were in her house at the time, she would believe you at once, and I dare say most of her friends would believe her. In that way I should be cleared; but surely it would be a very unpleasant course for you to pursue. Would it not be far better to fall in with my plan?"

In certain theatres the one sin which the audience

The Helplessness of Miss Pick 209

can never forgive the villain is his treatment of the defenceless heroine. My mind had run in this groove hitherto. I had never regretted the robbery on Mrs Lothbury's account, or on account of its abstract injury to society; but I had felt that it was exceedingly base of the thief to allow Miss Pick to be accused wrongfully. But when Miss Pick, differing entirely from the heroine of transpontine drama, calmly discussed the position as in no way an extraordinary one, I began to feel sorry for Sir Gilbert.

He, for his part, looked relieved at her tone. His sensation of shame was mitigated at her proposal to drive a hard bargain with him. He had been a thief and a coward; but it must have seemed to him that the girl had lost her right to expose him from the moment that she expressed a wish to marry him. He began to mutter hurriedly a few words, in which "speak to my bankers," "sensible of the compliment," "an easier and a more satisfactory way out of it," "any figure in reason," and "always deeply grateful," were audible from their setting of "ahems" and "don't-you-knows."

At once Miss Pick went on serenely. "I have been helped," she said, "by a gentleman—allow me to introduce Mr John Allen to you. It was he who found the diamonds in your bag. He is a member of your club. If I permit him, he will be only too happy to see that you do not remain a member of *his* club."

"The harmless lunatic," I said, as I rose and bowed.

Sir Gilbert's dream of resistance was dispelled. A man in his own club knew his shame. He must yield to Miss Pick's wishes or accept social ruin—if not the dock.

"And suppose I consent?" he asked, "how do I know that the matter will be hushed up? Someone stole

the diamonds, and the world, as well as the police, will want to understand. Besides, Mrs Lothbury is not a very easy person to deceive."

"Then do not let us try to deceive her. It does not matter what she thinks. We can make her say what we wish; and, if she is satisfied, everyone else must be."

"Ah!" exclaimed Sir Gilbert, enlightened by the uncompromising certainty of her accents, "then you have her letters?" and he touched the despatch-box by his side.

"They are in safe keeping," said Miss Pick; "and now, I must ask you to give me an answer."

"What can be your object in making me marry you? I have no money."

"I did not suppose you were rich; but girls who go out as companions do not look for rich husbands. You have a position, and when I am your wife I will make your fortune. You are young, good-looking, and titled" (Sir Gilbert drew himself up involuntarily, and glanced over his shoulder at the mirror); "and only accident could have made me a fit match for you."

"But I am not worthy of you," he said, feeling that he was going to do as she bade him.

"There is nothing to choose between us," she replied. "Is it polite, is it safe, to hesitate longer?"

"Very well," said Sir Gilbert; "but you will get a very bad husband. And something may leak out now."

"Mr Allen," she said, turning to me, "will make up a story that will account completely for the discovery of the diamonds; he can make up stories capitally."

Sir Gilbert held out his hand, and Miss Pick took it.

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